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(54) Electronic endoscope system and processor for electronic endoscope

Elektronisches Endoskopsystem und Prozessor für elektronisches Endoskop Système endoscope électronique et processeur pour endoscope électronique

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Description

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

⁵ **[0001]** The present invention relates to an electronic endoscope system that acquires vascular information about blood vessels from images captured through an endoscope. The present invention also relates to a processor for the electronic endoscope.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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[0002] In recent medical field, electronic endoscopes are frequently used for diagnoses and treatment. The electronic endoscope has a probing portion that is inserted into a body cavity, such as stomach, of a subject under inspection, and an imaging unit including a CCD or the like is incorporated in a distal end of the probing portion. The electronic endoscope is also connected to a light source unit, so that light from the light source unit is projected from the distal end of the

- ¹⁵ probing portion to illuminate the inside of the body cavity. While the inside of the body cavity is illuminated, subject tissues inside the body cavity are imaged by the imaging unit. Captured images are processed in various ways in a processor, which is also connected to the electronic endoscope, and the processed images are displayed on a monitor. The electronic endoscope thus allows viewing images of the inside of the body cavity of the subject under inspection in real time fashion, enabling the doctor to make exact diagnoses.
- 20 [0003] The light source unit generally uses a white light source, such as a xenon lamp that emits white light having a broadband wavelength range from the blue ray region to the red ray region. Using the white broadband light for illuminating the body cavity allows capturing such an image that is useful for observing the whole subject tissues inside the cavity. However, the image captured under the broadband light is indeed effective for rough perception of the subject tissues, but insufficient for observing the details of capillaries or microscopic vessels, deep blood vessels, bit-patterns (gland
- ²⁵ orifice structure), and surface asperity of the subject tissues, such as concaves and convexes. It is known in the art that the details of the subject tissues will be more visible when illuminated with narrowband light having a limited wavelength range. It is also known in the art that various kinds of information about the subject tissues, such as arterial and venous oxygen saturation levels, may be acquired from image data obtained under the narrowband illumination light, and the acquired information may be graphically displayed.
- ³⁰ **[0004]** For example, Japanese Patent No.3559755 discloses projecting sequentially three kinds of narrowband rays: the red ray, the green ray and the blue ray, to capture an image during each projection period of the ray of one kind. Because the ray of longer wavelength can reach deeper inside the tissues, and the wavelengths of the blue, green and red rays get longer in this order, an image of superficial blood vessels may be obtained during the blue ray illumination, an image of middle-layer vessels may be obtained during the green ray illumination, and an image containing enhanced
- ³⁵ deep blood vessels may be obtained during the red ray illumination. This prior art also discloses processing the respective images obtained during the separated color illumination, to produce an image showing the superficial blood vessels, the middle-layer vessels, and the deep blood vessels in different colors from each other. [0005] Japanese Patent No.2648494 discloses projecting three kinds of narrowband infrared rays IR1, IR2 and IR3,
- wherein the rays IR1 and IR3 are of such infrared regions that the light absorbance of blood vessels to the rays IR1 and IR3 will change according to the change in oxygen saturation of blood, whereas the ray IR2 is of such an infrared region that the light absorbance of blood vessels to the ray IR2 will not change regardless of oxygen saturation of blood. An image is captured during each projection period of the ray of one kind. On the basis of images captured under the illumination of the narrowband rays IR1 and IR3, to which the light absorbance of the blood vessels changes with the oxygen saturation, and an image captured under the illumination of the narrowband light IR2, to which the light absorbance
- ⁴⁵ will not change, variations in luminance between these images are calculated. The calculated luminance variations are reflected in an image to show the variations as gray-gradations or artificial color variations, so the image provides information about the oxygen saturation in the blood vessels. **100061** In Japanese Patent No 2761238, an endescene captures one image while prejecting a parrowhand ray of a

[0006] In Japanese Patent No.2761238, an endoscope captures one image while projecting a narrowband ray of a wavelength range around 650nm, to which the light absorbance of the vessels will change according to the change in

- ⁵⁰ oxygen saturation, and other images while projecting a narrowband ray of a wavelength range around 569nm light and a narrowband ray of a wavelength range around 800nm, to which the light absorbance of the vessels will not change regardless of the oxygen saturation. Base on these images, information on the distribution of the hemoglobin amount and information on the oxygen saturation are simultaneously acquired, to produce a color image reflecting these two kinds of information.
- ⁵⁵ **[0007]** There has recently been a demand for such a technology that makes the depth and oxygen saturation of the blood vessels perceivable at the same time on making diagnoses, treatments or the like. However, acquiring information about the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation at the same time has been difficult because of many factors, for example, because the light absorbance of hemoglobin in the blood vessels obviously changes depending on the

wavelength (see Fig.3), although simultaneous detection of the hemoglobin amount and the oxygen saturation can be achieved using illumination rays of different narrowband ranges, as disclosed in the above-mentioned Japanese Patent No. 2761238.

[0008] Projecting the three narrowband rays of red, green and blue, like in Japanese Patent No. 3559755, may provide

- ⁵ information about the blood vessel depth, but cannot provide information about the oxygen saturation. On the other hand, projecting the narrowband infrared rays IR1, IR2 and IR3, like in Japanese Patent No. 2648494, may provide information about the oxygen saturation, but cannot provide information about the blood vessel depth. Even with those rays of wavelength regions which meet both conditions defined in the Japanese Patents Nos. 3559755 and 2648494, it is hard to acquire information about the blood vessel depth and information about the oxygen saturation at once.
- ¹⁰ **[0009]** The present invention is provided in view of the foregoing problem, and has an object to provide an electronic endoscope system and a processor for an endoscope, which allow acquiring information about the blood vessel depth and information about the oxygen saturation as well. The present invention also has an object to provide a method of displaying these two kinds of vascular information at the same time.
- [0010] US-A-2006/0184037 discloses a pulsed lighting imaging system comprising an illumination segment that trans-¹⁵ mits light to an examination target. There are provided first, second and third illumination sources irradiating at different wavelengths. A filtering section may contain one or more narrow band pass filters, one of which including a violet filter (about 380 nm to about 415 nm).

[0011] US 2008/0294105 A1 discloses an electronic endoscope system having an illuminating device which projects first and second narrowband rays of different wavelengths toward subject tissue. Reflected illumination light is captured

20 by an imaging device within an electronic endoscope. From the output signals of the imaging device narrowband signals are extracted. Blood vessel information from blood vessels at different depths is obtained from the narrowband signals.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

- 25 [0012] The present invention provides an electronic endoscope system that comprises the features of claim 1 [0013] The illumination light includes first, second and third narrowband rays of different wavelength ranges from each other, or has a wavelength range including both of the wavelength ranges of the first, second and third narrowband rays. At least one of the first and second narrowband rays has a central wavelength of not more than 450nm. The first and second narrowband signals correspond to the first and second narrowband rays respectively. The vascular information
- ³⁰ includes both information about vessel depth and information about oxygen saturation representative of the percentage of oxygenated hemoglobin in the blood vessels. For example, the central wavelengths of the first and second narrowband rays may be 445nm and 473nm, 405nm and 445nm, or 405nm and 473nm, respectively, or may have other values. [0014] The first and second narrowband rays preferably include such wavelengths, at which light absorbance in oxygenated hemoglobin differs from light absorbance in reduced hemoglobin that is not combined with oxygen, and that
- 35 the light absorbance in hemoglobin to the first narrowband ray and the light absorbance in hemoglobin to the second narrowband ray differ from each other.
 100451 The electronic endeagene system of the research invention for the second narrowband ray differ from each other.

[0015] The electronic endoscope system of the present invention further comprises a second narrowband signal obtaining device for obtaining the third narrowband signal from the the imaging signals, the third narrowband signal corresponding to the third narrowband ray having a different wavelength range from the first and second narrowband

- 40 rays; a luminance ratio calculator for calculating a first luminance ratio between the first and third narrowband signals and a second luminance ratio between the second and third narrowband signals; and a first storage device previously storing correlations between the first and second luminance ratios and the vessel depth and the oxygen saturation. For example, the vascular information acquiring device may acquire the information about the vessel depth and the information about the oxygen saturation from the first and second luminance ratios calculated by the luminance ratio calculator, with
- ⁴⁵ reference to the correlation stored in the first storage device. [0016] The first storage device preferably stores the correlation by correlating a luminance coordinate system that indicates the first and second luminance ratios to a vascular information coordinate system that indicates the vessel depth and the oxygen saturation. The vascular information acquiring device may determine first coordinates in the luminance coordinate system, corresponding to the first and second luminance ratios calculated by the luminance ratio
- 50 calculator. Then the vascular information acquiring device may determine second coordinates in the vascular information coordinate system, corresponding to the first coordinates of the luminance coordinate system, one coordinate value of the second coordinates representing the vessel depth and the other coordinate value of the second coordinates representing the oxygen saturation.
- [0017] In an embodiment, the first narrowband ray has a wavelength range of 440±10nm, the second narrowband ray has a wavelength range of 470±10nm, and the third narrowband ray has a wavelength range of 400±10nm. However, the present invention is not limited to this embodiment. For example, the first narrowband ray may have the wavelength range of 400±10nm, the second narrowband ray may have the wavelength range of 440±10nm, and the third narrowband ray may have the wavelength range of 470±10nm, or the first narrowband ray may have the wavelength range of

 470 ± 10 nm, the second narrowband ray may have the wavelength range of 400 ± 10 nm, and the third narrowband ray may have the wavelength range of 440 ± 10 nm.

[0018] In an embodiment where the imaging device has red pixels, green pixels and blue pixels, which are provided with red, green and blue filters respectively, the illuminating device is capable of projecting white broadband light having

- ⁵ a wavelength range covering red, green and blue regions, to which the red, green and blue pixels are respectively sensitive. In this embodiment, the electronic endoscope system may preferably comprise an ordinary image producer for producing an ordinary image from the image signal as captured while the broadband light is being projected.
 [0019] Preferably, two of the first to third narrowband rays have wavelength ranges, to which either the blue pixel or the green pixel is sensitive, whereas a remaining one of the first to third narrowband rays has a wavelength range, to
- ¹⁰ which both the blue pixel and the green pixel are sensitive. [0020] In an embodiment, the illuminating device is capable of projecting the first to third narrowband rays individually, wherein the narrowband signal obtaining device may obtain the first to third narrowband signals respectively from three frames of the image signals, which are captured respectively under the first to third narrowband rays which are sequentially projected from the illuminating device.
- ¹⁵ **[0021]** In another embodiment, the illuminating device is capable of projecting the first to third narrowband rays individually, and the narrowband signal obtaining device obtains the first to third narrowband signal from first and second frames of the image signals. The first frame may be captured while the illuminating device is projecting one of the first to third narrowband rays that has a wavelength range, to which either the blue pixel or the green pixel is sensitive. On the other hand, the second frame may be captured while the illuminating device is projecting other two of the first to third
- 20 narrowband rays simultaneously. [0022] Preferably, the electronic endoscope system further comprises a second storage device storing correlation between luminance values of blue and green pixels contained in a frame of the image signals, which is captured under the broadband light. In this embodiment, the illuminating device is capable of projecting the broadband light and at least one of the first to third narrowband rays simultaneously, and the imaging device captures a first frame while the illuminating
- ²⁵ device is projecting one of the first to third narrowband rays that has a wavelength range, to which either the blue pixel or the green pixel is sensitive, simultaneously with the broadband light. The imaging device captures a second frame while the illuminating device is projecting other two of the first to third narrowband rays simultaneously with the broadband light. With reference to the correlation stored in the second storage device, the narrowband signal obtaining device obtains the first to third narrowband signals by subtracting those luminance values which are based on the broadband
- ³⁰ light from respective luminance values of the first and second frames.
 [0023] In another embodiment, the illuminating device is capable of projecting white broadband light having a wavelength range covering from blue region to red region as well as all the wavelength ranges of the first to third narrowband rays. In this embodiment, the broadband light as reflected from the subject tissues is filtered through an optical filter, to selectively pass one of the first to third narrowband rays to the imaging device, so the imaging device sequentially outputs
- ³⁵ image signals each corresponding to the one of the first to third narrowband rays that passes through the optical filter. Then, the narrowband signal obtaining device may obtain these image signals as the first to third narrowband signals. [0024] Preferably, the electronic endoscope system further comprises a third narrowband signal obtaining device for obtaining a fourth narrowband signal corresponding to a fourth narrowband ray that has a different wavelength range from the first to third narrowband rays. In this example, the vascular information acquiring device acquires the vascular
- 40 information including information about both the vessel depth and the oxygen saturation on the basis of the first to fourth narrowband signals.
 100251 It is also possible to obtain multiple parrowband signals corresponding to other parrowband rays of different

[0025] It is also possible to obtain multiple narrowband signals corresponding to other narrowband rays of different wavelength ranges from the first to third narrowband rays, and acquire the information about the vessel depth and the oxygen saturation on the basis of the multiple narrowband signals and the first to third narrowband signals as well.

⁴⁵ **[0026]** The electronic endoscope system of the present invention preferably comprises a display device for displaying the information on the vessel depth and the information on the oxygen saturation selectively from one another or simultaneously with each other.

[0027] In another aspect of the present invention, a processor for an electronic endoscope is provided. The electronic endoscope projects illumination light toward subject tissues inside a body cavity and outputs image signals representative

- ⁵⁰ of luminance of the illumination light as being reflected from the subject tissues and captured through an imaging device. The illumination light includes first and second narrowband rays of different wavelength ranges from each other, at least one of the first and second narrowband rays having a central wavelength of not more than 450nm, or the illumination light has a wavelength range including both of the wavelength ranges of the first and second narrowband rays. The processor according to the present invention comprises the features as defined in claim 11.
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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0028] The above and other objects and advantages of the present invention will be more apparent from the following

detailed description of the preferred embodiments when read in connection with the accompanied drawings, wherein like reference numerals designate like or corresponding parts throughout the several views, and wherein:

- Figure 1 is a diagram illustrating an outer appearance of an electronic endoscope system according to a first embodiment of is the present invention;
 - Figure 2 is a block diagram illustrating a circuitry of the electronic endoscope system of the first embodiment;
 - Figure 3 is a graph showing spectral transmittance curves of color filters for red, green and blue;
 - Figure 4A is an explanatory diagram illustrating an imaging operation of a CCD in an ordinary lighting imaging mode; Figure 4B is an explanatory diagram illustrating an imaging operation of the CCD in a special lighting imaging mode; Figure 5 is a graph showing light absorption coefficients of hemoglobin;
 - Figure 6 is a graph showing correlation between luminance ratios S1/S3 and S2/S3, and blood vessel depth and oxygen saturation;

Figure 7A is an explanatory diagram illustrating a method of deriving coordinates (X*, Y*) of a luminance coordinate system from the first and second luminance ratios S1*/S3* and S2*/S3*;

- ¹⁵ Figure 7B is an explanatory diagram illustrating a method of deriving coordinates (U*, V*) of a vascular information coordinate system, which correspond to the coordinates (X*, Y*) of the luminance coordinate system;
 Figure 8 is a diagram illustrating a monitor screen which alternately displays an image showing information on the vessel depth or an image showing information on the oxygen saturation;
- Figure 9 is a diagram illustrating a monitor screen displaying both an image showing information on the vessel depth and an image showing information on the oxygen saturation at once;
 - Figure 10 is a flowchart illustrating the procedure of calculating information on blood vessel depth and oxygen saturation, and producing an image showing information on the vessel depth and an image showing information on the oxygen saturation, these images reflecting the information;
 - Figure 11 is an explanatory diagram illustrating an imaging operation in a second embodiment of the present invention; Figure 12 is an explanatory diagram illustrating a variation of the imaging operation in the second embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 13 is an explanatory diagram illustrating an imaging operation in a third embodiment of the present invention; Figure 14 is a block diagram illustrating the circuitry of an electronic endoscope system according to a fourth embodiment of the present invention;

- ³⁰ Figure 15 is a block diagram illustrating the circuitry of an electronic endoscope system according to a fifth embodiment of the present invention;
 - Figure 16 is a schematic diagram illustrating a rotary filter;

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- Figure 17A is an example of a block diagram illustrating a vessel depth image producer;
- Figure 17B is a block diagram illustrating an example of an oxygen saturation image producer;
- Figure 18 is a graph showing color information that represents the blood vessel depth in three grades;
- Figure 19A is a graph showing a half color circle between two complementary colors, served as a scale for the blood vessel depth;

Figure 19B is a graph showing a half color circle between two complementary colors, served as a scale for the oxygen saturation;

- ⁴⁰ Figure 20A is a graph showing a gray scale indicative of the blood vessel depth;
 - Figure 20B is a graph showing a gradation between two colors, served as a scale for the blood vessel depth;

Figure 21 is a diagram illustrating a monitor screen displaying an image showing information on the vessel depth and an image showing information on the oxygen saturation, wherein color bar scales are shown in the respective images:

⁴⁵ Figure 22 is a diagram illustrating a monitor screen displaying an image showing information on the vessel depth and an image showing information on the oxygen saturation, wherein vessels in a designated depth range or at a designated oxygen saturation level are emphasized;

Figure 23 is a diagram illustrating an example of an image displayed on a monitor, wherein an image showing the vessel depth includes a section reflecting the oxygen saturation;

- Figure 24 is a diagram illustrating an embodiment, wherein blood vessels existing in a designated portion of an image taken under broadband light are displayed separately according to their depths; Figure 25 is an explanatory diagram illustrating an embodiment, wherein a section containing those blood vessels having a given oxygen saturation level or being in a given oxygen saturation range is automatically outlined within an image showing information on the vessel depth;
- ⁵⁵ Figure 26 is an explanatory diagram illustrating an embodiment, wherein a frame is automatically displayed on an endoscopic image to surround those blood vessels having a given oxygen saturation level or being in a given oxygen saturation range and existing at a given depth or in a given depth range;

Figure 27 is an explanatory diagram illustrating an embodiment, wherein a window showing blood vessels at a given

oxygen saturation level or in a given oxygen saturation range is displayed outside an endoscopic image; Figure 28 is a block diagram illustrating another structure of a blood vessel image producer according to a further embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 29 is a graph showing a U-V coordinate system that is associated with a color circle;

Figure 30 is a diagram illustrating an image taken under broadband light, on which color information is reflected, wherein one color is assigned to each combination of the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation;

Figure 31 is a diagram illustrating an example of an image displayed on a monitor, wherein an individual blood vessel is displayed in such colors that reflect the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation of that vessel;

Figure 32 is a diagram illustrating an image displayed on a monitor, wherein the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation are displayed as text information;

Figure 33 is a diagram illustrating an example of an image displayed on a monitor, wherein superficial blood vessels are emphasized;

Figure 34 is an explanatory diagram illustrating an embodiment, wherein color information indicating the oxygen saturation is reflected on those vessels having a given thickness or being in a given thickness range;

¹⁵ Figure 35 is an explanatory diagram illustrating an embodiment, wherein color information indicating the oxygen saturation is reflected on those vessels which exist in an area where the density of blood vessels is at a given level or in a given range;

Figure 36 is an explanatory diagram illustrating an embodiment, wherein color information indicating the oxygen saturation is reflected on those vessels which exist in an area where the fluorescence intensity of a fluorescent agent is at a given level or in a given range; and

Figure 37 is an explanatory diagram illustrating an embodiment, wherein color information indicating the oxygen saturation is reflected on those vessels having a given blood density or being in a given blood density range.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

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[0029] As shown in Fig. 1, an electronic endoscope system 10 according to the first embodiment of the present invention includes an electronic endoscope 11, a processor 12, a light source unit 13 and a monitor 14. The endoscope 11 images the interior of a body cavity of a subject under inspection. The processor 12 produces images of the tissues inside the body cavity from electronic signals from the endoscope 11. The light source unit 13 provides light for illuminating the

- ³⁰ inside of the body cavity, and the monitor 14 displays the images of the interior of the body cavity. The electronic endoscope 11 includes a flexible probing portion 16 to be inserted into the body cavity, a handling portion 17 coupled to a proximal end of the probing portion 16, and a cord 18 connecting the handling portion 17 to the processor 12 and the light source unit 13.
- [0030] The probing portion 16 has a curving distal end that consists of serially linked segments. The curving portion 19 may curve in any directions in response to the operation on an angle knob 21 of the handling portion 17. A tip portion 16a formed in the distal end of the curving portion 19 contains an optical system for imaging the interior of the body cavity. The tip portion 16a may be oriented to any desirable direction inside the body cavity through the curving portion 19. [0031] The cord 18 is coupled to a connector 24 on the side of the processor 12 and the light source unit 13. The connector 24 is a complex connector consisting of a connector terminal for data communication and a connector terminal
- for light source. Through this connector 24, the electronic endoscope 11 may be removably connected to the processor 12 and the light source unit 13.

[0032] As shown in Fig.2, the light source unit 13 includes a broadband light source 30, a shutter 31, a shutter driver 32, first to third narrowband light sources 33 to 35, a photo-coupler 36, and a light source switching section 37. The broadband light source 30 may be a xenon lamp, white LED or micro-white light source, which emits broadband light

- BB having a wavelength range from the red ray region to the blue ray region (about 470nm to 700nm). The broadband light source 30 is kept ON while the electronic endoscope 11 is in operation. The broadband light BB from the broadband light source 30 is converged through a condenser lens 39 and then introduced into a broadband optical fiber 40.
 [0033] A shutter 31 is installed in between the broadband light source 30 and the condenser lens 39, so as to be
- movable into a light path of the broadband light BB to block the broadband light BB, or out of the light path to allow the
 broadband light BB to travel to the condenser lens 39. A shutter driver 32, which is connected to a controller 59 that is
 included in the processor 12, controls driving the shutter 31 according to instructions from the controller 59.
 [0034] The first to third narrowband light sources 33 to 35 may be laser diodes or the like. The first narrowband light source 33 emits a first narrowband ray N1, the second narrowband light source 34 emits a second narrowband ray N2,
- and the third narrowband light source 35 emits a third narrowband ray N3. For example, the first narrowband ray N1 has a wavelength limited to 440±10nm, preferably to 445nm, the second narrowband ray N2 has a wavelength limited to 470±10nm, preferably to 473nm, and the third narrowband ray N3 has a wavelength limited to 400±10nm, preferably to 405nm. The first to third narrowband light sources 33 to 35 are connected to the first to third narrowband optical fibers 33a to 35a respectively, so that the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3 from the respective light sources are introduced

into the first to third narrowband optical fibers 33a to 35a.

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[0035] The coupler 36 couples the broadband optical fiber 40 and the first to third narrowband optical fibers 33a to 35a to a light guide 43 in the electronic endoscope. Thus, the broadband light BB can enter the light guide 43 via the broadband optical fiber 40. On the other hand, the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3 can enter the light guide 43 via the first to third narrowband optical fibers 33a to 35a respectively.

- **[0036]** The light source switching section 37 is connected to the controller 59 in the processor 12, to turn the first to third narrowband light sources 33 to 35 ON or OFF according to the instruction from the controller 59. In the first embodiment, when the system 10 is set at an ordinary lighting imaging mode, the broadband light source 30 is turned ON to illuminate the inside of body cavity with the broadband light BB to capture an image under ordinary lighting,
- ¹⁰ whereas the first to third narrowband light sources 33 to 35 are turned OFF. On the other hand, when the system 10 is set at a special lighting imaging mode using the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3, the broadband light BB stops being projected into the body cavity, and the first to third narrowband light sources 33 to 35 are sequentially turned ON and OFF to illuminate the body cavity sequentially with the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3, thereby to capture images under special lighting.
- ¹⁵ **[0037]** Specifically, the first narrowband light source 33 is first turned on through the light source switching section 37. Then, while the first narrowband ray N1 is illuminating inside the body cavity, imaging of the subject tissues is carried out. When the imaging is complete, the controller 59 outputs an instruction to switch over the light source, upon which the first narrowband light source 33 is turned OFF, and the second narrowband light source 34 is turned ON. Thereafter when an image has been captured while the second narrowband ray N2 is illuminating the body cavity, the second
- ²⁰ narrowband light source 34 is turned OFF, and the third narrowband light source 35 is turned ON. Moreover, when another image has been captured while the third narrowband ray N3 is illuminating the body cavity, the third narrowband light source 35 is turned OFF.

[0038] The electronic endoscope 11 includes the light guide 43, a CCD 44, an analog front end (AFE) 45, and an imaging controller 46. The light guide 43 may be a large-diameter optical fiber or a handle fiber, which has an inlet end

- inserted into the coupler 36 in the light source unit 13. An outlet end of the light guide 43 is opposed to a projection lens 48 that is mounted in the tip portion 16a. The light from the light source unit 13 is conducted through the light guide 43 and then outputs to the projection lens 48. The light entering the projection lens 48 is projected into the body cavity through a lightening window 49 that is mounted in a face end of the tip portion 16a. The broadband light BB and the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3 are each reflected from the body cavity, and then fall on a condenser lens 51 through an observation window 50 that is mounted in the face end of the tip portion 16a.
- [0039] The CCD 44 receives the light from the condenser lens 51 on a photo sensing surface 44a to convert the received light amount to electric charges and accumulate the charges. The accumulated charges are read out as image signals and sent to the AFE45. The CCD 44 is a color CCD having three-color pixels arranged on the photo sensing surface 44a, wherein filters for red (R), green (G) and blue (B) are respectively allocated to the pixels for red (R), green
 (G) and blue (B).

[0040] The color filters for red (R), green (G) and blue (B) have spectral transmittances 52, 53 and 54, as shown in Fig.3, respectively. Among the light entering the condenser lens 51, the broadband light BB has a wavelength of about 470nm to 700nm. Therefore, the RGB color filters respectively transmit such components of the broadband light BB that have wavelengths corresponding to their spectral transmittances 52, 53 and 54. Providing that image signal R designates

- ⁴⁰ an electric signal obtained through photo-electric conversion on the red pixels, image signal G designates an electric signal obtained through photo-electric conversion on the green pixels, and image signal B designates a signal obtained through photo-electric conversion on the blue pixels, a broadband image signal composed of the image signals RGB will be provided when the broadband light BB falls on the CCD 44.
- [0041] On the other hand, among the light entering the condenser lens 51, the first narrowband ray N1 has a wavelength of 440±10nm, so it can travel merely through the blue color filter. Accordingly, when the CCD 44 receives the first narrowband ray N1, the CCD 44 outputs a first narrowband image signal composed of a blue image signal. Since the second narrowband ray N2 has a wavelength of 470±10nm, it can travel through the blue and green color filters. Accordingly, when the CCD 44 receives the second narrowband ray N2, the CCD 44 outputs a second narrowband image signal composed of blue and green image signals. Since the third narrowband ray N3 has a wavelength of 100±10 m it can travel through the third narrowband ray N3 has a wavelength of
- 400±10nm, it can travel through the blue color filter only. Accordingly, when the CCD 44 receives the third narrowband ray N3, the CCD 44 outputs a third narrowband image signal composed of a blue image signal.
 [0042] The AFE 45 is constituted of a correlated double sampling circuit (CDS), an automatic gain control circuit (AGC), and an analog-to-digital converter (A/D), which are omitted from the drawings. The CDS processes the image signal from the CCD 44 through correlated double sampling, to eliminate noises that may be caused by the drive of the CCD
- 44. The AGC amplifies the image signal after the noise reduction through the CDS. The A/D converts the amplified image signal to a digital image signal of a predetermined bit number, and outputs the digital image signal to the processor 12.

[0043] The imaging controller 46 is connected to the controller 59 in the processor 12, to send a drive signal to the

CCD 44 in response to a corresponding instruction from the controller 59. Based on the drive signal from the imaging controller 46, the CCD 44 outputs the image signal to the AFE45 at a designated frame rate. In the first embodiment, when the system 10 is set at the ordinary lighting imaging mode, as shown in Fig. 4A, two operation steps are carried out during one frame capturing period: the broadband light BB being photo-electrically converted to electric charges and

- ⁵ accumulated as the signal charges, and the accumulated signal charges being read as the broadband image signal. The system 10 repeats these operation steps so long as it is set at the ordinary lighting imaging mode.
 [0044] On the other hand, when the system 10 is switched from the ordinary lighting imaging mode to the special lighting imaging mode, as shown in Fig.4B, electric charges obtained through photo-electric conversion of the first narrowband ray N1 is accumulated as signal charges, and the accumulated signal charges is read as the first narrowband
- ¹⁰ image signal in a first frame capturing period. After completing reading the first narrowband image signal, electric charges obtained through photo-electric conversion of the second narrowband ray N2 is accumulated as signal charges, and the accumulated signal charges is read as the second narrowband image signal in a second frame capturing period. After completing reading the second narrowband image signal, electric charges obtained through photo-electric conversion of the second narrowband image signal in a second frame capturing period. After completing reading the second narrowband image signal, electric charges obtained through photo-electric conversion of the third narrowband ray N3 is accumulated as signal charges, and the accumulated signal charges is read as the
- ¹⁵ third narrowband image signal in a third frame capturing period. [0045] As shown in Fig.2, the processor 12 includes a digital signal processor (DSP) 55, a frame memory 56, a blood vessel image producer 57, and a display control circuit 58, which are under the control of the controller 59. The DSP 55 processes the broadband image signal and the first to third narrowband image signals, as being output from the AFE 45 of the electronic endoscope, for color-separation, color-interpolation, white-balance adjustment, gamma correction
- and the like, to produce broadband image data and first to third narrowband image data. The frame memory 56 stores the broadband image data and the first to third narrowband image data as produced by the DSP 55. The broadband image data is color image data including data of the captured three-color images RGB.
 [0046] The blood vessel image producer 57 includes a luminance ratio calculator 60, a correlation memory 61, a vessel
- depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62, a vessel depth image producer 63 and an oxygen saturation image producer 64. The luminance ratio calculator 60 identifies such an image area that contains blood vessels, hereinafter called the vascular area, on the basis of the first to third narrowband image data stored in the frame memory 56. The luminance ratio calculator 60 calculates a first luminance ratio S1/S3 between the first and third narrowband images with respect to individual pixels in the vascular area, wherein S1 represents the luminance of one pixel of the first narrowband image, whereas S3 represents the luminance of a corresponding pixel of the third narrowband image, the corresponding pixel
- 30 representing the same location of the subject as the one pixel of the first narrowband image. The luminance ratio calculator 60 also calculates a second luminance ratio S2/S3 between the second and third narrowband images, wherein S2 represents the luminance of a corresponding pixel of the second narrowband image, which represents the same location of the subject as the corresponding pixels of the first and third narrowband images. Note that the method of identifying the vascular area may for example be a method of identifying the vascular area on the basis of differences in luminance 35 between blood vessels and other body portions.
- [0047] The correlation memory 61 memorizes correlation between the first and second luminance ratios S1/S3 and S2/S3 and the oxygen saturation and the blood vessel depth. The correlation may be acquired from analyses of an enormous amount of the first to third narrowband image data obtained and accumulated through diagnoses and the like, on the basis of light absorption coefficient of hemoglobin contained in the blood vessels. As shown in Fig.5, hemoglobin
- in the blood vessels has such light absorption characteristics that the light absorption coefficient μa varies depending on the wavelength of the illumination light. The light absorption coefficient μa indicates the degree of light absorbance of hemoglobin, i.e. the magnitude of light absorption in hemoglobin. The light absorption coefficient is a coefficient used in a formula expressing the attenuation of light projected onto hemoglobin: loexp(-μa × x), wherein lo stands for the intensity of light projected from a light source toward a subject tissue, and x(cm) stands for the depth to a blood vessel in the subject tissue.
- ⁴⁵ in the subject tissue. [0048] Since reduced hemoglobin, which is not combined with oxygen, has a different light absorption characteristic curve 70 from a light absorption characteristic curve 71 of oxygenated hemoglobin that is combined with oxygen, the light absorbance of the reduced hemoglobin differs from that of the oxygenated hemoglobin, except at isosbestic points (intersections between the curves 70 and 71), at which reduced hemoglobin and oxygenated hemoglobin have the same
- ⁵⁰ degree of light absorbance (the same light absorption coefficient μ a). Because of the difference in light absorbance between reduced hemoglobin and oxygenated hemoglobin, the luminance of an identical blood vessel will vary depending upon the percentage of oxygenated hemoglobin in that vessel, even while the vessel is illuminated with light of constant intensity and wavelength. In addition, the light absorption coefficient μ a and hence the luminance will change with the wavelength of the illumination light, even if the light intensity is unchanged.
- ⁵⁵ **[0049]** In view of the above light absorption characteristics of hemoglobin, as shown in Fig.5, the light absorbance of blood vessels will vary depending on the oxygen saturation, especially at wavelengths of 445nm and 473nm. Since the ray of longer wavelength can reach the deeper inside the tissues, the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3 preferably include at least a narrowband ray of a wavelength range having a center wavelength of not more than 450nm, in order

to cover the wide depth range in acquiring information about blood vessel depth. In the first embodiment, the first and the third narrowband rays N1 and N3 satisfy this condition. Even where the oxygen saturation is the same, if the wavelength of the illumination light is different, the light absorption coefficient will change, and hence the reaching depth of the illumination light into the mucous membrane will change. Accordingly, the correlation between the luminance ratio

and the blood vessel depth may be determined by making use of the property of light that the depth of reach will vary depending on the wavelength.
 [0050] The correlation memory 61 memorizes the correlation as shown in Fig.6, wherein coordinates of a luminance

coordinate system 66 that represents the first and second luminance ratios S1/S3 and S2/S3 are correlated with coordinates of another luminance coordinate system 67 that represents the oxygen saturation and the blood vessel depth. The luminance coordinate system 66 is an X-Y coordinate system, wherein X axis represents the first luminance ratio

S1/S3 and Y axis represents the second luminance ratio S2/S3. The luminance coordinate system 67 is a U-V coordinate system provided on the luminance coordinate system 66, wherein U axis represents the blood vessel depth, and V axis represents the oxygen saturation. The U axis has a positive inclination because the blood vessel depth has a positive correlation to the luminance coordinate system 66. Concerning the U axis, upper-right direction indicates decreasing

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- ¹⁵ blood vessel depth, and lower-left direction indicates increasing blood vessel depth. On the other hand, the V axis has a negative inclination because the oxygen saturation has a negative correlation to the luminance coordinate system 66. Concerning the V axis, upper-left direction indicates descending oxygen saturation, and lower-right direction indicates ascending oxygen saturation. It is to be noted that the information on the blood vessel depth may be numerical values that increase with the blood vessel depth. Also the information on the oxygen saturation may be numerical values in the same way as the information on the blood vessel depth.
- ²⁰ same way as the information on the blood vessel depth.
 [0051] In the luminance coordinate system 67, the U axis and the V axis orthogonally intersect at a point P. This is because oxygenated hemoglobin has a reversed magnitude relation between the light absorbance to the first narrowband ray N1 and the light absorbance to the second narrowband ray N2 from that of reduced hemoglobin. Specifically, as shown in Fig.5, to the first narrowband ray N1 having the wavelength of 440±10nm, the light absorption coefficient of
- ²⁵ reduced hemoglobin 70 is higher than the light absorption coefficient of oxygenated hemoglobin 71, of which the oxygen saturation is higher than the oxygen saturation of reduced hemoglobin. On the contrary, to the second narrowband ray N2 having the wavelength of 470±10nm, the light absorption coefficient of oxygenated hemoglobin 71 is higher than the light absorption coefficient of reduced hemoglobin 70. That is, the order in magnitude of the light absorption coefficient to the first narrowband ray N1 and the light absorption coefficient to the second narrowband ray N2 is reversed between
- 30 the reduced hemoglobin 70 and the oxygenated hemoglobin 71. It is to be noted that the U axis and V axis would not be orthogonal if the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3 were set in such wavelength ranges, to which the magnitude relation between the light absorption coefficient of oxygenated hemoglobin 71 and the light absorption coefficient of reduced hemoglobin 70 is unchanged. Meanwhile, to the third narrowband ray N3 having the wavelength of 400±10nm, the light absorption coefficient of oxygenated hemoglobin is approximately equal to that of reduced hemoglobin.
- ³⁵ [0052] On the basis of the correlation stored in the correlation memory 61, the vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62 determines the oxygen saturation and the blood vessel depth corresponding to the first and second luminance ratios S1/S3 and S2/S3 that are calculated by the luminance ratio calculator 60. Hereinafter, among the first and second luminance ratios S1/S3 and S2/S3 calculated by the luminance ratio calculator 60, the first luminance ratio at a particular pixel in the vascular area will be expressed as S1*/S3*, and the second luminance ratio on the particular pixel will be expressed by S2*/S3*.

[0053] The vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62 determines coordinates (X^*, Y^*) in the luminance coordinate system 66, which correspond to the first and second luminance ratios S1*/S3* and S2*/S3*, as shown in Fig.7A. After determining the coordinates (X^*, Y^*) , the calculator 62 determines coordinates (U^*, V^*) in the luminance coordinate system 67, which correspond to the coordinates (X^*, Y^*) as shown in Fig.7B. Thus, the blood vessel depth U* and the

- ⁴⁵ oxygen saturation V* are determined with respect to the particular pixel in the vascular area. [0054] The vessel depth image producer 63 includes a color table 63a that assigns color information of different colors to different ranges of the blood vessel depth. For example, the color table 63a assigns blue to blood vessels in a superficial range, green to blood vessels in a middle range, and red to blood vessels in a deep range. Thus, blood vessels of different depth ranges are displayed in different colors within the image, to be clearly distinguishable from one another.
- ⁵⁰ With reference to the color table 63a, the vessel depth image producer 63 decides the color information to each pixel in the vascular area according to the blood vessel depth U* that is calculated for each pixel by the vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62.

[0055] After deciding the color information to every pixel inside the vascular area, the vessel depth image producer 63 reads out the broadband image data from the frame memory 56, to reflect the color information on the broadband

⁵⁵ light image data. Thus, data of a vessel depth image is produced, which informs of the depth levels of the contained blood vessels. The vessel depth image data is stored again in the frame memory 56. Alternatively, the color information may be reflected on either of the first to third narrowband image data or a composite image composed of the first to third narrowband image data, not on the broadband light image data.

[0056] The oxygen saturation image producer 64 includes a color table 64a that assigns color information of different colors to different levels of the oxygen saturation. For example, the color table 63a assigns cyan to blood vessels of a low oxygen saturation level, magenta to blood vessels of a middle oxygen saturation level, and yellow to blood vessels of a high oxygen saturation level. Thus, blood vessels of different oxygen saturation levels are displayed in different

⁵ colors within the image, to be clearly distinguishable from one another. Like the vessel depth image producer 63, the oxygen saturation image producer 64 refers to the color table 64a to decide the color information to each pixel in the vascular area according to the oxygen saturation V* that is calculated for each pixel by the vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62. By reflecting the color information on the broadband image data, the oxygen saturation image producer 64 produces data of an oxygen saturation image. The oxygen saturation image data is stored in the frame memory 56, like the vessel depth image data.

[0057] The display control circuit 58 reads out one or more images from the frame memory 56, to be displayed on the monitor 14. There may be a variety of patterns available for displaying the images. For example, as shown in Fig. 8, the monitor 14 displays an image 72 taken under the broadband light on one side of a screen, and an image 73 showing vessel depth or an image 74 showing oxygen saturation level on the other side of the screen, wherein the images 73

- ¹⁵ and 74 are interchangeable in response to an image changing switch 68 (see Fig. 2). Alternatively, the vessel depth image 73 and the oxygen saturation image 74 may be displayed at once on the same screen, as shown in Fig.9. [0058] The vessel depth image 73 may contain an image 75 of superficial blood vessels, an image 76 of middle-layer vessels, and an image 77 of deep blood vessels. According to the present embodiment, the image 75 is displayed in blue, the image 76 is displayed in green, and the image 77 is displayed in red. On the other hand, in the oxygen saturation
- ²⁰ image 74, an image 80 of those blood vessels which are at the low oxygen saturation level is displayed in cyan, and an image 81 of blood vessels at the middle oxygen saturation level is displayed in magenta, whereas an image 82 of blood vessels at the high oxygen saturation level is displayed in yellow.

[0059] Now the sequence of acquiring information on the depth and oxygen saturation level of blood vessels and producing an image showing information on the vessel depth and an image showing information on the oxygen saturation

- level will be described with reference to the flowchart shown in Fig.10. First, the console 23 is operated to switch the system 10 from the ordinary lighting imaging mode to the special lighting imaging mode. When the system 10 is switched to the special lighting imaging mode, broadband image data obtained at this moment is stored in the frame memory 56, for use in producing the vessel depth image or the oxygen saturation image. Note that broadband image data obtained before the system 10 is switched to the special lighting imaging mode may be used for producing the vessel depth image or the oxygen saturation image.
 - **[0060]** When the controller 59 sends an illumination stop command to the shutter driver 32, the shutter driver 32 drives the shutter 31 to move into the optical path of the broadband light BB to interrupt the broadband light BB from the body cavity. When the broadband light BB is interrupted, the controller 59 sends an illumination start command to the light source switching section 37. Then the light source switching section 37 turns the first narrowband light source 33 ON,
- to project the first narrowband ray N1 into the body cavity. While the first narrowband ray N1 is being projected into the body cavity, the controller 59 sends an imaging start command to the imaging controller 46. Thereby, a first narrowband image signal is obtained under the first narrowband ray N1, and is sent through the AFE45 to the DSP 55. The DSP 55 produces the first narrowband image data from the first narrowband image signal, and the first narrowband image data is stored in the frame memory 56.
- 40 [0061] When the first narrowband image data has been stored in the frame memory 56, the controller 59 outputs a light source switching command to the light source switching section 37, to switch the body cavity illumination light from the first narrowband ray N1 to the second narrowband ray N2. Then the second narrowband image signal is captured under the second narrowband ray N2 in the same way as for the first narrowband ray N1, and the second narrowband image data is produced from the second narrowband image signal. The second narrowband image data is stored in the frame memory 56.
- frame memory 56. [0062] When the second narrowband image data is stored in the frame memory 56, the controller 59 outputs a light source switching command to the light source switching section 37, to switch the illumination light from the second narrowband ray N2 to the third narrowband ray N3. Then the third narrowband image signal is captured under the third narrowband ray N3 in the same way as for the second narrowband ray N2, and the third narrowband image data is
- ⁵⁰ produced from the third narrowband image signal. The third narrowband image data is stored in the frame memory 56. [0063] When the broadband image data and the first to third narrowband image data have been stored in the frame memory 56, the luminance ratio calculator 60 extracts a vascular area containing blood vessels from the first narrowband image data, the second narrowband image data, the third narrowband image data. Thereafter, the luminance ratio calculator 60 S1*/S3* between the first and the third narrowband image data, and
- ⁵⁵ the second luminance ratio S2*/S3* between the second and the third narrowband image data, with respect to a particular pixel in the vascular area.

[0064] Next, the vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62 determines the coordinates (X*, Y*) in the luminance coordinate system, which correspond to the first and second luminance ratios S1*/S3* and S2*/S3*, with reference to

the correlation data stored in the correlation memory 61. The vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62 also determines the coordinates (U^*, V^*) in the luminance coordinate system, which correspond to the coordinates (X^*, Y^*) . Thus, the vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62 acquires information on the blood vessel depth U* and the oxygen saturation V* with respect to the particular pixel in the vascular area.

- ⁵ **[0065]** After the blood vessel depth U* and the oxygen saturation V* are detected with respect to the particular pixel, the vessel depth image producer 63 determines the color information corresponding to the blood vessel depth U* with reference to the color table 63a, and also determines the color information corresponding to the oxygen saturation V* with reference to the color table 64a. The determined color information is stored in a RAM that is not shown but provided in the processor 12.
- ¹⁰ **[0066]** After storing the color information in the RAM, the vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62 determines the blood vessel depth U* and the oxygen saturation V* with respect to every pixel in the vascular area in the same way as described above, and also determines the color information corresponding to the blood vessel depth U* and the color information corresponding to the oxygen saturation V*.
- [0067] When the information on the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation and the color information corresponding to these values are acquired with respect to every pixel in the vascular area, the vessel depth image producer 63 reads out the broadband image data from the frame memory 56, and reflects the color information corresponding to the blood vessel depths of the respective pixels on the read broadband image data, to produce the vessel depth image data. Like the vessel depth image producer 63, the oxygen saturation image producer 64 produces the oxygen saturation image data. The vessel depth image data and the oxygen saturation image data are stored in the frame memory 56.
- 20 [0068] Then, the display control circuit 58 reads out the broadband image data, the vessel depth image data, and the oxygen saturation image data from the frame memory 56, to display based on these data, the broadband light image 72, the vessel depth image 73, and the oxygen saturation image 74 on the monitor 14, as shown in Fig.8 or 9. In Fig.8, the monitor 14 displays the broadband light image 72, which is taken in the ordinary lighting mode, and the vessel depth image 73 or the oxygen saturation image side by side on the same screen. In Fig.9, the monitor 14 displays the broadband
- ²⁵ light image 72, the vessel depth image 73, and the oxygen saturation image 74 simultaneously. [0069] The endoscope system 10 of the first embodiment projects the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3 one after another to capture one frame for one narrowband. Thus, totally three image frames of the same subject are successively captured in one imaging cycle of the special lighting imaging mode. Alternatively, in the second embodiment of the present invention, as shown in Fig. 11, the third narrowband ray N3 is first projected into the body cavity to capture an
- ³⁰ image frame, and then a composite narrowband ray composed of the first and second narrowband rays N1 and N2 is projected to capture a second image frame. From these two image frames, the first to third narrowband image data is produced. That is, the number of image frames necessary for producing the first to third narrowband image data is reduced from three to two as compared to the first embodiment. The reduced number of image frames is preferable, because pixel deviations between the frames, which may be caused by the movement of the subject body under inspection
- ³⁵ or the movement of the probing portion of the endoscope, tend to be suppressed. Since the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation are determined based on the luminance ratios between the corresponding pixels that represent the same location of the subject in the first to third narrowband image data, the less pixel deviation will lead to the higher accuracy.
- [0070] Because the electronic endoscope system of the second embodiment may have the same structure as the electronic endoscope system 10 of the first embodiment, except the sequence of switching between the first to third narrowband light sources 33 to 35, and the image signals from the CCD 44, the structure of the second embodiment is not illustrated in the drawings, and only the essential feature of the second embodiment will be explained below.
 [0071] In the second embodiment, the first to third narrowband light sources 33 to 35 are turned OFF in the ordinary
- ⁴⁵ lighting imaging mode. When the system is switched from the ordinary lighting imaging mode to the special lighting ⁴⁵ imaging mode, the third narrowband light source 35 is turned ON by the light source switching section 37. Thus, an ⁴⁶ imaging under the third narrowband ray N3 is complete, the controller 59 gives an instruction to switch the ⁴⁷ light source, upon which the third narrowband light source 35 is turned OFF, and the first and second narrowband light ⁵⁰ sources 33 and 34 are turned ON. Then, a second image frame is captured while a composite ray composed of the first ⁵⁰ and second narrowband rays N1 and N2 is being projected into the body cavity. When the second image frame has
- been captured, the first and second narrowband light sources 33 and 34 are turned OFF.
 [0072] In the second embodiment, image signals output from the CCD 44 are as follows: Since the third narrowband ray N3, which is projected first into the body cavity, can travel only through the blue filter, an image signal B1 is obtained through the blue pixels, having luminance L3 based on the third narrowband ray N3. As for the composite narrowband
- ⁵⁵ ray projected after the third narrowband ray N3, the first narrowband ray N1 travels through the blue filter, and the second narrowband ray N2 travels through the blue and green filters. Therefore, an image signal B2 including luminance L1 based on the first narrowband ray N1 and luminance L2 based on the second narrowband ray N2 is obtained through the blue pixels, and an image signal G2 having luminance L2 based on the second narrowband ray N2 is obtained

through the green pixels. Consequently, the CCD 44 outputs the following image signals to the DSP 55 of the processor 12:

Image signal B1 = luminance L3

Image signal B2 = luminance L1 + luminance L2

Image signal G2 = luminance L2

[0073] The DSP 55 produces the first to third narrowband image data from the image signals B1, B2 and G2. Since the image signal B1 merely represents the luminance L3 that is based on the third narrowband ray N3, the third 15 narrowband image data may be obtained from the image signal B1. Likewise, since the image signal G2 merely represents the luminance L2 that is based on the second narrowband ray N2, the second narrowband image data may be obtained from the image signal G2. The first narrowband image data, on the other hand, may be obtained by separating the luminance L2 from the image signal B2 using a calculation: B2- (constant) xG2, wherein the constant is determined by the ratio of intensity between the first narrowband ray N1 and the second narrowband ray N2. The obtained first to third narrowband image data are stored in the frame memory 56.

[0074] As a variation of the second embodiment, it is possible to project the first narrowband ray N1 first, and then a composite narrowband ray composed of the second and third narrowband rays N2 and N3, as shown in Fig. 12. In that case, the following image signals may be obtained:

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Image signal B1 = luminance L1 based on the first narrowband ray N1

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Image signal B2 = luminance L2 based on the second narrowband ray N2 + luminance L3 based on the third narrowband ray N3

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Image signal G_2 = luminance L_2 based on the second narrowband ray

40 N2

> [0075] In the case of Fig.12, the DSP 55 produces the first narrowband image data from the image signal B1, the second narrowband image data from the image signal G2. On the other hand, the third narrowband image data may be obtained by separating the luminance L2 from the image signal B2 using a calculation: B2- (constant) xG2, wherein the constant is determined by the ratio of intensity between the second narrowband ray N2 and the third narrowband ray N3. [0076] Unlike the first and second embodiments, wherein the broadband light BB is not projected together with the

> first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3, the third embodiment of the present invention, as shown in Fig.13, first projects the first narrowband ray N1 and the broadband light BB at the same time to capture a first image frame, and then projects

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- the second narrowband ray N2, the third narrowband ray N3 and the broadband light BB all at once to capture a second 50 image frame. From these two frames of image signal, the first to third narrowband image data are produced. Moreover, in the third embodiment, the broadband image data may be produced simultaneously with the first to third narrowband image data. Therefore, when the broadband image is displayed together with the information about the blood vessel depth and/or the oxygen saturation on the monitor 14, as shown in Figs.8 and 9, there is no time lag between the broadband image and the information. This feature of the third embodiment is superior to the first and the second 55 embodiments.
 - [0077] The electronic endoscope system of the third embodiment may have the same structure as the electronic endoscope system 10 of the first embodiment, except that the DSP 55 of the first embodiment is replaced with a DSP

101 as shown in Fig. 13, and that the driving operation of the shutter 31, the switching sequence between the first to third narrowband light sources 33 to 35 and image signals output from the CCD 44 are different from those in the above embodiments. Therefore, the structure of the electronic endoscope system of the third embodiment is omitted from the drawings, and the following description will relate merely to essential features of the third embodiment.

- 5 [0078] In the third embodiment, the shutter 31 is always kept away from the optical path of the broadband light source 30, and the broadband light source 30 is kept ON during the operation of the electronic endoscope 11. Therefore, the broadband light BB continues being projected into the body cavity. On the other hand, the first to third narrowband light sources 33 to 35 are turned OFF in the ordinary lighting imaging mode. When the system is switched from the ordinary lighting imaging mode to the special lighting imaging mode, the first narrowband light source 33 is first turned ON by the
- 10 light source switching section 37. While the first narrowband ray N1 and the broadband light BB are being projected into the body cavity, a first image frame is captured from the subject tissues. After the first image frame is captured, the controller 59 outputs a switching command, upon which the first narrowband light source 33 is turned OFF, and the second and third narrowband light sources 34 and 35 are turned ON. Then, a second image frame is captured while the second narrowband ray N2, the third narrowband ray N3 and the broadband light BB are being projected into the body
- 15 cavity. Thereafter, the second and the third narrowband light sources 34 and 35 are turned OFF. [0079] In the third embodiment, the CCD 44 outputs the image signals in the following manner. Of the light components that fall on the photo sensing surface 44a of the CCD 44 while the first narrowband ray N1 and the broadband light BB are being projected, the first narrowband ray N1 travels through the blue filter, whereas the broadband light BB travels through both the blue and green filters. As a result, an image signal B1 representing luminance L1 based on the first
- 20 narrowband ray N1 and luminance Broad_B1 based on the broadband light BB is obtained through the blue pixels of the CCD 44, and an image signal G1 having luminance Broad_G1 based on the broadband light BB is obtained through the green pixels of the CCD 44.

[0080] On the other hand, while the second and third narrowband rays N2 and N3 and the broadband light BB are being projected, the second narrowband ray N2 and the broadband light BB travel through both the blue and green

- 25 filters, whereas the third narrowband ray N3 travels merely through the blue filter. As a result, an image signal B2, which consists of luminance L2 based on the second narrowband ray N2, luminance L3 based on the third narrowband ray N3, and luminance Broad_B2 based on the broadband light BB, is obtained through the blue pixels of the CCD 44. Also an image signal G2, which consists of the luminance L2 and luminance Broad_G2 based on the broadband light BB, is obtained through the green pixels of the CCD 44. Consequently, the CCD 44 outputs the following image signals to the 30 DSP 101:

Image signal B1 = luminance L1 + luminance Broad_B1

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Image signal G1 = luminance Broad_G1

Image signal B2 = luminance L2 + luminance L3 + luminance Broad_B2 40

Image signal G2 = luminance L2 + luminance Broad_G2

45 [0081] The DSP 101 of the third embodiment includes a broadband luminance correlation memory 101a that memorizes correlation between the luminance Broad_B1, the luminance Broad_G1, the luminance Broad_B2, and the luminance Broad_G2. The correlation may be acquired through an analysis of an enormous volume of image data obtained from diagnoses, inspections and the like. With reference to the broadband luminance correlation memory 101a, the DSP 101 determines those luminance values Broad_B1, Broad_B2 and Broad_G2 which have correlation to the luminance value 50 Broad_G1. Then, the DSP 101 separates the determined luminance values Broad_B1, Broad_B2 and Broad_G2 from the image signals B1, B2 and G2 respectively, to obtain the following image signals:

Image signal B1* = luminance L1

Image signal B2* = luminance L2 + luminance L3

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Image signal G2* = luminance L2

- [0082] The DSP 101 derives the first narrowband image data from the image signal B1*, and the second narrowband image data from image signal G2*. On the other hand, the third narrowband image data is obtained by separating the luminance value L2 from image signal B2* using a calculation: B2*-(constant)×G2*, wherein the constant is determined by the ratio of intensity between the second and third narrowband rays. The first to third narrowband image data are stored in the frame memory 56.
- [0083] In the third embodiment, luminance values Broad_B1, Broad_G1, Broad_B2 and Broad_G2 may be obtained based on the broadband light BB in the special lighting imaging mode. Therefore, not only the narrowband image data (data of special images taken under the special lighting) but also the broadband image data (data of a full-color image taken under the ordinary lighting) may be obtained at once. Also in the third embodiment, the first narrowband ray N1 and the third narrowband ray N3 are interchangeable, like the variation from Fig. 11 to Fig. 12 in the second embodiment. [0084] In the fourth embodiment of the present invention, as shown in Fig.14, the first to third narrowband light sources
- ¹⁵ 33 to 35 are not installed, but an acousto-optical tunable filter 103 is provided in an electronic endoscope 11, so that the broadband light BB as projected from the endoscope 11 and reflected from the subject tissues is sequentially separated into the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3 through the acousto-optical tunable filter 103. As a result, a CCD 44 sequentially captures images based on the spectrally-filtered rays. Otherwise, an electronic endoscope system 102 of the fourth embodiment may have the same configuration as the electronic endoscope system 10 of the first embodiment.
 ²⁰ Therefore, merely essential features of the fourth embodiment will be described.
- ²⁰ Therefore, merely essential features of the fourth embodiment will be described. [0085] In the electronic endoscope system 102 of the fourth embodiment, the acousto-optical tunable filter 103 is disposed between an observation window 50 and a condenser lens 51. The acousto-optical tunable filter 103 separates the broadband light BB, as being reflected from the body cavity, sequentially into the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3. For example, the acousto-optical tunable filter 103 first separates the first narrowband ray N1 from the reflected
- ²⁵ broadband light BB, and then separate the second narrowband ray N2, and thereafter the third narrowband ray N3 from the reflected broadband light BB. However, the sequence of spectral separation is not limited to this order. The acoustooptical tunable filter 103 is connected to the imaging controller 46, to send a spectral switching signal to the imaging controller 46 each time the acousto-optical tunable filter 103 switches the turn of spectral separation among the three narrowband rays. In response to the spectral switching signal, the imaging controller 46 outputs an imaging signal to
- ³⁰ the CCD 44. Thus, the CCD 44 captures an image signal while it receives one of the three narrowband rays from the acousto-optical tunable filter 103. Consequently, the CCD 44 outputs the first to third narrowband image signals, like the first embodiment.

[0086] It is also possible to provide spectral filters on a CCD in place of the color filters on the CCD 44, in order to obtain the narrowband rays N1 to N3 from the broadband light BB as it enters through the tip portion of the electronic

- ³⁵ endoscope 11. Concretely, a first kind of filters allowing only the first narrowband ray N1 to pass therethrough, a second kind of filters allowing only the second narrowband ray N2 to pass therethrough, and a third kind of filters allowing only the third narrowband ray N3 to pass therethrough may be arranged in front of pixels of the CCD. The CCD with the spectral filters makes it possible to separate the broadband light BB into the narrowband rays, without the need for the acousto-optical tunable filter 103.
- ⁴⁰ [0087] Referring to Fig.15, an electronic endoscope system 105 of the fifth embodiment of the present invention is shown, wherein the broadband light source 30 is not provided, but a fluorescent material 106 is provided at an outlet port of a light guide 43, so that the fluorescent material 106 generates the broadband light BB from the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3. Otherwise, the fifth embodiment may have the same configuration as the electronic endoscope system 10 of the first embodiment. Therefore, merely essential features of the fifth embodiment will be described.
- ⁴⁵ **[0088]** The fluorescent material 106 converts one fractions of the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3 to broadband light BB having a wavelength range from about 470 to 700nm, and also let other fractions of the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3 pass through it without any conversion. In the fifth embodiment, the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3 are projected in the following sequence, to obtain the same image signals as in the third embodiment.
- [0089] First, the first narrowband light source 33 is turned ON. Then, the body cavity is illuminated with the broadband light BB obtained from the first narrowband ray N1 by the conversion through the fluorescent material 106 as well as the first narrowband ray N1 passing through the fluorescent material 106 without conversion. When an image frame is captured under this lighting condition is complete, the first narrowband light source 33 is turned OFF, and the second and third narrowband light sources 34 and 35 are turned ON. Then, the body cavity is illuminated with the broadband light BB obtained from the second and third narrowband rays N2 and N3 by the conversion through the fluorescent
- ⁵⁵ material 106 as well as the second and third narrowband rays N2 and N3 passing through the fluorescent material 106 without conversion. Another image frame is captured under this lighting condition. These two frames of image signal are converted to the first to third narrowband image data in the same sequence as the third embodiment.

[0090] The above first to fifth embodiments use the first to third narrowband light sources for the purpose of obtaining the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation. It is possible to use a fourth narrowband light source in addition to these light sources. The fourth narrowband light source may generate a fourth narrowband ray N4 having a limited wavelength of around 532nm (for example 530±10nm). The first to fourth narrowband ray N1 to N4 are projected to

- ⁵ obtain the first to fourth narrowband image data, based on which the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation may be determined. Since the light of longer wavelength will reach deeper inside the subject tissues, the fourth narrowband ray N4 having the longer wavelength than the second narrowband ray N2 will provide information about those blood vessels which exit in a deeper range than the second narrowband ray N2 can reach.
- [0091] In this configuration, the luminance ratio calculator 60 extracts the vascular area from the first to fourth narrowband image data. Then, like the first embodiment, the first and second luminance ratios S1/S3 and S2/S3 are determined. In addition, the luminance ratio calculator determines a third luminance ratio S4/S3 between the third narrowband image data and the fourth narrowband image data, wherein S4 represents pixel luminance of the fourth narrowband image data. Thereafter, in the same procedure as the first embodiment, the vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62 acquires information on the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation corresponding to the first to third luminance
- ¹⁵ ratios calculated by the luminance ratio calculator 60, with reference to correlation between the first to third luminance ratios S1/S3, S2/S3 and S4/S3 and the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation, the correlation being previously experimentally obtainable.

[0092] The first to fourth narrowband rays N1 to N4 may be individually projected into the body cavity, or it is possible to project any two or more of the first to fourth narrowband rays N1 to N4 as a composite light, like in the second or the

- 20 third embodiment, in order to reduce the number of image frames to be correlated. For example, the first narrowband ray N1 and the fourth narrowband ray N4 may be simultaneously projected into the body cavity to capture a first image frame. Thereafter, the second narrowband ray N2 and the third narrowband ray N3 may be projected simultaneously into the body cavity to capture a second image frame.
- [0093] The first image frame includes a blue image signal B1 and a green image signal G1, whereas the second image frame includes a blue image signal B2 and a green image signal G2. These image signals B1, G1, B2 and G2 have the following luminance values:
 - Image signal B1 = luminance L1 based on the first narrowband ray N1 + luminance L4 based on the fourth narrowband ray N4

Image signal G1 = luminance L4 based on the fourth narrowband ray

35

N4

N2

30

Image signal B2 = luminance L2 based on the second narrowband ray

N2 + luminance L3 based on the third narrowband ray N3

45

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Image signal G2 = luminance L2 based on the second narrowband ray

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[0094] From the image signal G2 having the luminance L2 only, the second narrowband image data may be produced. From the image signal G1 having the luminance L4 only, the fourth narrowband image data may be produced. With the calculation: B1-(constant)×G1, the luminance L4 may be separated from the image signal B1, to produce the first narrowband image data, wherein the constant is decided by the intensity ratio between the first narrowband ray N1 and the fourth narrowband ray N4. With the calculation: B2- (constant) xG2, the luminance L3 may be separated from the image signal B2, to produce the second narrowband image data, wherein the constant is decided by the intensity ratio between the second narrowband ray N2 and the third narrowband ray N3.

[0095] In the first to third embodiments, the first to third narrowband light sources are used for generating the first to

third narrowband rays N1 to N3. In another embodiment, the first to third narrowband light sources are not installed, but a rotary filter 108 is installed in place of the shutter 31 of Fig.2, so that the first to third narrowband rays N1 to N3 may be generated from the broadband light BB through the rotary filter 108. As shown in Fig. 16, the rotary filter 108 includes a broadband light transmissive sector 108a that allows the whole broadband light BB from the broadband light source

- ⁵ 30 to pass through it. The rotary filter 108 also includes first to third narrowband light transmissive sectors 108b, 108c and 108d. The first narrowband light transmissive sector 108b allows merely the first narrowband ray N1 to pass through it among the light components of the broadband light BB. The second narrowband light transmissive sector 108c allows merely the second narrowband ray N2 of the broadband light BB to pass through it. The third narrowband light transmissive sector 108d allows only the third narrowband ray N3 of the broadband light BB to pass through it. The rotary filter 108
- ¹⁰ is rotatable such that the broadband light transmissive sector 108a is placed on the optical path of the broadband light source 30 to generate the broadband light BB, or the first, the second or the third narrowband light transmissive sector 108b, 108c or 108d is placed on the optical path of the broadband light source 30 to generate the first, the second or the third narrowband ray N1, N2 or N3, respectively.
- [0096] In another embodiment, the vessel depth image producer 63 may include multiple color tables specified for different body sites. As shown for example in Fig.17A, the vessel depth image producer 63 may include a color table 63b for stomach, a color table 63c for duodenum, and a color table 63d for small intestines. From among these color tables 63b to 63d, the operator can select a suitable one by operating the console 23 in accordance with the subject tissues under inspection. The color table 63b for stomach stores color information corresponding to blood vessel depth ranges in the stomach. The color table 63c for duodenum stores color information corresponding to blood vessel depth
- ranges in the duodenum, and the color table 63d for small intestines stores color information corresponding to blood vessel depth ranges in the small intestines. The vessel depth image producer 63 uses one of the color tables 63b to 63d, which is selected at the console 23, to determine a color to be assigned to the blood vessel depth U* that is calculated by the vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62 in the way as described above. Note that the color tables are not limited to those for stomach, duodenum and small intestines, but other color tables may be used in addition to or instead of these color tables.

[0097] Like the vessel depth image producer 63, the oxygen saturation image producer 64 may also include multiple color tables for different body sites. For example, as shown in Fig.17B, the oxygen saturation image producer 64 may include a color table 64b for stomach, a color table 64c for duodenum, and a color table 64d for small intestines. These color tables 64b to 64d are selectable by operating the console 23. The oxygen saturation image producer 64 uses either

- of the color tables 64b to 64d, which is selected at the console 23, to determine a color to be assigned to the oxygen saturation V* that is calculated by the vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62.
 [0098] The color tables 63b to 63d of the vessel depth image producer 63 may store color information that allocates different colors to different grades of the blood vessel depth. In an example, as shown in Fig. 18, the blood vessel depth is graded into a superficial range, a middle range, and a deep range, and as the color information, blue represents blood
- ³⁵ vessels in the superficial range, green represents blood vessels in the middle range, and red represents blood vessels in the deep range. Likewise, color information representative of the oxygen saturation may allocate different colors to different oxygen saturation levels. In the above described first embodiment, cyan represents a low oxygen saturation level, magenta represents a middle oxygen saturation level, and yellow represents a high oxygen saturation level. But the color information is not limited to this embodiment. For example, yellow may be assigned to oxygen saturation of 0% to 30% magenta to oxygen saturation of 30% to 70%, and so forth
- 40 0% to 30%, magenta to oxygen saturation of 30% to 70%, and so forth.
 [0099] In another embodiment, a half color circle between two complementary colors, for example, hues from red (R) to cyan (Cy) may be used for the color information stored in the color tables 63b to 63d of the vessel depth image producer. In the color information shown in Fig.19A, red (R) represents a superficial range of the blood vessel depth, and the hue changes from red (R) to yellow (Ye), green (G), and cyan (Cy) as the blood vessel depth increases. Color
- ⁴⁵ information stored in the color tables 64b to 64d of the oxygen saturation image producer 64 may also be a half color circle between two complementary colors. In an example of Fig. 19B, the color information is cyan (Cy) for a lowest oxygen saturation level, and the hue changes from cyan to blue (B), magenta (M) and red (R) with an increase in the oxygen saturation. The color circles used for representing the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation level may be interchanged. For example, the color circle from red to cyan may serve as the color information on the oxygen
- ⁵⁰ saturation, while the color circle from cyan to red may serve as the color information on the blood vessel depth. Moreover, it is possible to use the same pattern or sequence of colors, such as hues from R to Cy, for both the oxygen saturation and the blood vessel depth, except in a case where the oxygen saturation and the blood vessel depth are indicated as color information within the same vascular image or an image of a single blood vessel, as will be described later.
- [0100] In another embodiment, as shown in Fig.20A, a gray scale or lightness gradation of an achromatic or chromatic color may serve as the color information. In the example of Fig.20A, the darkness decreases (the lightness increases) as the blood vessel depth increases.

[0101] It is also possible to use a gradation between two complementary colors for the color information, as shown in Fig.20B. For example, as the color information, the chrominance changes from red to cyan with the increase in the blood

vessel depth. As the gradation between two complementary colors includes neutral in the intermediate point, blood vessels in the middle depth range will be displayed in gray. According to a result of experiments, the gradation between two complementary colors is effective to improve the visibility of the subsequent vascular image. The same gradation scale as shown in Fig.20A or 20B may be applied to the color information for the oxygen saturation.

- ⁵ **[0102]** Although the same kind of color information is applied to the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation in the above embodiments, different kinds of color information may represent different vascular information. For example, while the color information representing the blood vessel depth is a half color circle containing hues between two complementary colors, like as shown in Fig.19A, the color information representing the oxygen saturation may be a gray scale, a lightness gradation of a chromatic color, or a gradation between two complementary colors, like as shown in
- Fig. 20, instead of a half color circle containing hues between two complementary colors, like as shown in Fig.19B.
 [0103] After deciding the color information to every pixel inside the vascular area, the vessel depth image producer 63 reads out the broadband image data from the frame memory 56, to reflect the color information on the broadband light image data. Thus, data of a vessel depth image is produced, which informs of the depth levels of the contained blood vessels. The vessel depth image data is stored in the frame memory 56. Alternatively, the color information may
- ¹⁵ be reflected on either of the first to third narrowband image data or a composite image composed of the first to third narrowband image data, not on the broadband light image data. It is also possible to convert the broadband image data to an achromatic image to reflect the color information on the vascular area in the achromatic image. Reflecting the color information on the first to third narrowband image data or on the monochrome image will improve the visibility of the vascular information.
- [0104] Like the vessel depth image producer 63, the oxygen saturation image producer 64 reflects the color information on the broadband image data with respect to every pixel in the vascular area, to produce data of an oxygen saturation image. The oxygen saturation image data is stored in the frame memory 56, like the vessel depth image data.
 [0105] On the basis of the image data stored in the frame memory 56, the display control circuit 58 displays images
- on the monitor 14. For example, as shown in Fig. 21, the monitor 14 displays an image 72 based on the broadband ²⁵ image data on one side of a screen, as well as a vessel depth image 73 based on the vessel depth image data and an oxygen saturation image 74 based on the oxygen saturation image data on the other side of the screen. For example, where the color information stored in the color tables 63b to 63d and 64b to 64d correspond to the color circles shown in Figs.19A and 19B, the vessel depth image 73 contains vascular image 75 of superficial blood vessels that is displayed in red (R), vascular image 76 of middle-layer vessels displayed in green (G), and vascular image 77 of deep blood
- ³⁰ vessels displayed in cyan (Cy). On the other hand, in the oxygen saturation image 74, vascular image 80 of low oxygen saturation is displayed in cyan (Cy), vascular image 81 of middle oxygen saturation is displayed in magenta (M), and vascular image 82 of high oxygen saturation is displayed in red (R).
 [0106] In addition, the vessel depth image 73 contains a color bar 73a showing hues from red to cyan of the color
- circle, and the oxygen saturation image 74 contains a color bar 74a showing hues from cyan to red of the color circle. The color bar 73a has an arrow to show the direction in which the blood vessel depth increases, with text information about the vessel depth on opposite ends of the arrow. The color bar 74a also has an arrow and text information in the same manner as the color bar 73a. Displaying the color bars 73a and 74a with the vessel depth image 73 and the oxygen saturation image 74 will help visual recognition of the relation between the color information reflected on the vessel depth
- image 73 and the blood vessel depth, as well as the relation between the color information reflected on the oxygen saturation image 74 and the oxygen saturation.
 [0107] In the embodiment of Fig.21, the colors of the vascular images 75 to 77 in the vessel depth image 73 change depending on the blood vessel depth, and the colors of the vascular images 80 to 82 in the oxygen saturation image 74 change depending on the oxygen saturation. In another embodiment, as shown in Fig.22, a vessel depth image 110
- may emphasize such vascular image 117 that represents blood vessels in a deeper range than a predetermined level
 among other vascular images 115 and 116 representative of blood vessels in a shallower range. Also in an oxygen saturation image 111, vascular image 123 representative of those blood vessels in which oxygen saturation is more than a predetermined level among other vascular images 121 and 122.
 [0108] In the above embodiments, the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation are respectively shown as color

information in the vessel depth image 73 and the oxygen saturation image 74. Alternatively, it is possible to reflect these two kinds of vascular information as color information on a single image. For example, as shown in Fig.23, among

- two kinds of vascular information as color information on a single image. For example, as shown in Fig.23, among vascular images 75 to 77 contained in a vessel depth image 73, the vascular images 76 and 77 may be displayed in such colors or gradations that represent the blood vessel depth (for example, using the color circle between two complementary colors), whereas vascular image 75 inside a designated section 92 may be displayed in such colors or gradations that does not represent the blood vessel depth but the oxygen saturation. Thus, it is possible to display two kinds of vascular information in one endoscopic image.
 - **[0109]** The designated section 92 is displayed in a way distinguishable from other portions of the image 73, for example, by changing the background color or framing with a frame. On the upper left corner of the designated section 92 is displayed a color bar 92a corresponding to the color information about the oxygen saturation. The designated

section 92 may be located anywhere in the vessel depth image 73, by operating the console 23, or may be located in a predetermined portion of the image 73. This embodiment allows checking the oxygen saturation of blood vessels in the designated section 92 of the vessel depth image 73, while checking the depth of blood vessels in other portions of the vessel depth image 73.

- ⁵ **[0110]** Alternatively, as shown in Fig.24, a section 125 may be designated in the broadband light image 72, so that images of blood vessels in the designated section 125 are displayed separately from an image display area 72a for the broadband light image 72. Moreover, an image 126 of superficial blood vessels, an image 127 of middle-layer vessels, and an image 128 of deep blood vessels are displayed in an enlarged size, separately from each other. Furthermore, color information about the oxygen saturation is reflected on the respective vascular images 126 to 128. For example,
- ¹⁰ in each vascular image shown in Fig.24, dashed lines show the vessels of low oxygen saturation, solid lines show the vessels of high oxygen saturation. In the same way as described above, it is possible to display an image of blood vessels at a low oxygen saturation level, an image of blood vessels at a middle oxygen saturation level, and an image of blood vessels at a high oxygen saturation level in an enlarged size, separately from the broadband light image 72 as well as from each other. In that case, color information about the blood vessel depth may be reflected on the respective
- ¹⁵ vascular images as sorted according to the oxygen saturation. In addition to the color information, it is possible to display text information in the respective vascular images: the text information may be a numerical value of the blood vessel depth, an average oxygen saturation of the vessels contained in each vascular image, the area size of those vessels at the low oxygen saturation level, the area size of those vessels at the high oxygen saturation level, and so forth. **101411** In the embediment of Fig 22, the leastion of the section 02 in the vessel depth image, 72 is designed by
- [0111] In the embodiment of Fig.23, the location of the section 92 in the vessel depth image 73 is designated by operating the console 23. In another embodiment, as shown in Fig.25, an operator may enter an oxygen saturation level or range through the console 23 before or while the operator is making diagnosis based on an endoscopic image 72. Then, a section containing those vessels which are at the entered oxygen saturation level or in the entered oxygen saturation range is automatically surrounded by a bounding frame 135. A numerical value 135a indicating the oxygen saturation level or range may also be displayed inside the frame 135.
- [0112] In the embodiment of Fig. 25, the frame 135 is displayed in the vessel depth image 73 to surround those blood vessels having a given oxygen saturation level or being in a given oxygen saturation range. Alternatively, as shown in Fig.26, a bounding frame 140 may be automatically displayed in a broadband light image 72, to surround those blood vessels having a given oxygen saturation level or being in a given oxygen saturation range and existing at a given depth or in a given depth range. Numerical values 140a indicating the oxygen saturation (StO2) and the blood vessel depth (D) may be displayed inside the frame 140.
 - [0113] In another embodiment, as shown in Fig. 27, a window 145 may be displayed outside an endoscopic image 143, showing those vessels having such oxygen saturation levels that are more than a given value or in a given range. A numerical value 145a indicating the oxygen saturation of the vessels shown in the window 145 is displayed in a corner of the window 145. On the other hand, in the endoscopic image 143, a circle 146 roughly shows the original location of
- the vessels displayed in the window 145. Thus, the circle 146 in the image 143 provides a linkage or shows the correlation between the vessels in the window 145 and the vessels in the endoscopic image 143. Although the embodiment of Fig. 27 has been described with respect to a vessel depth image 73, it is possible to display a separate window with respect to an oxygen saturation image 74 in the same way as for the vessel depth image 73.
- [0114] It is also possible to provide two sections in a broadband light image: one reflecting color information about the blood vessel depth, and the other reflecting color information about the oxygen saturation.
 [0115] In a further embodiment, as shown in Fig. 28, a blood vessel image producer 57 does not include the vessel
- **[0115]** In a further embodiment, as shown in Fig. 28, a blood vessel image producer 57 does not include the vessel depth image producer 63 and the oxygen saturation image producer 64, but includes a color information determiner 95 and a vessel depth and oxygen saturation image producer 96 instead. The color information determiner 95 determines color information that corresponds to both the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation.
- ⁴⁵ [0116] The color information determiner 95 includes a color table 95a for stomach, a color table 95b for duodenum, and a color table 95c for small intestines. In the color tables 95a to 95c, a color circle 97 is associated with a U-V coordinate system, of which U axis represents the blood vessel depth and V axis represents the oxygen saturation, as shown in Fig.29, whereby color information is stored in association with the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation. The circumferential direction of the color circle 97 represents hues H, and the radial direction of the color circle 97
- ⁵⁰ represents color saturation St. The color information determiner 95 refers to a suitable one of the color tables 95a to 95c according to the body site being inspected, thereby to determine the hue H* and the color saturation St* corresponding to the blood vessel depth U* and the oxygen saturation V*, which may be calculated by the vessel depth and oxygen saturation calculator 62 in the same way as described above.
- [0117] When the color information representative of the hue and the color saturation has been determined with respect to every pixel in the vascular area, the vessel depth and oxygen saturation image producer 96 reflects the determined color information on broadband image data that is read out from the frame memory 56. Based on the broadband image data output from the vessel depth and oxygen saturation image producer 96, on which the color information about the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation is reflected, the display control circuit 58 controls the monitor 14 to display

a broadband light image 72, as shown in Fig.30. The broadband light image 72 of this embodiment contains vascular images 98 having variable hues and color saturations according to the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation. In addition, a scale 99 indicating the color circle associated with the U-V coordinate system is displayed on the same screen as the broadband light image 72, to show the relation between the color information and the vessel depth and the ve

- ⁵ the oxygen saturation. [0118] In another embodiment of the present invention, an individual vascular image may be displayed in two colors in an endoscopic image: one is color information reflecting the blood vessel depth, and the other is color information reflecting the oxygen saturation. For example, as shown in Fig.31, edges 100a along an axis of a blood vessel 100 are displayed in a color designated as color information about the blood vessel depth, whereas a center area 100b along
- ¹⁰ the axis of the blood vessel 100 is displayed in another color designated as color information about the oxygen saturation. The endoscopic image containing such dual-colored vascular images may be a broadband light image or an achromatic image. The color information applied to this embodiment may be based on the color circle. For example, the hues from red to cyan are usable for the blood vessel depth, and the hues from cyan to red are usable for the oxygen saturation, like the embodiment of Fig. 19. The color information based on the gradation between two complementary colors or the
- ¹⁵ neutral gradation is also applicable to this embodiment. [0119] Referring to Fig. 32 illustrating another embodiment of the present invention, it is possible to display text information about the blood vessel depth (D) and the oxygen saturation (StO2) of a designated vessel 148 in a broadband light image 72. Designation of the vessel may be carried out by operating the console 23. Instead of the text information, vascular information may be displayed as a vector, of which the length represents the blood vessel depth, and the angle
- 20 represents the oxygen saturation. [0120] According to another embodiment of the present invention, color information representative of the oxygen saturation is reflected only on those vessels which are in a designated depth range. In an example shown in Fig.33, vascular images 157 of superficial blood vessels are distinguished from other vascular images 158 and 159 in the broadband light image 72. For example, merely the vascular images 157 of superficial blood vessels are colored with
- variable hues according to their oxygen saturation levels. The color information may for example be based on the hues from cyan to red of the color circle, wherein vessels of the low oxygen saturation is displayed in cyan, and vessels of the high oxygen saturation are displayed in red. A color bar 72b showing the color information as a scale for the oxygen saturation is displayed in the broadband light image 72. Although the color information about the oxygen saturation is reflected on the vascular images of superficial vessels in the above example, it is alternatively possible to reflect the
- 30 color information about the oxygen saturation on vascular images of middle-layer vessels or on vascular images of deep blood vessels.

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[0121] In the embodiment shown in Fig.33, the vascular images 157 of a designated depth range are identified in the broadband light image 72. However, vascular images of a designated depth range may be identified in a vessel depth image 73, to reflect the color information about the oxygen saturation on the identified vascular images in the vessel depth image 73.

[0122] Moreover, in the embodiment shown in Fig. 33, it is possible to reduce the contrast of other vascular images 158 and 159 than the vascular images 157 that reflects the color information, in order that the vascular images 157 reflecting the color information will be more conspicuous.

- [0123] According to a further embodiment of the present invention, the thickness or diameter of every blood vessel contained in the broadband light image 72 is detected, and only those vessels having a given thickness or being in a given thickness range are sorted out to display color information about the oxygen saturation on these vessels. In order to detect the thickness of each vessel contained in the broadband light image 72, an electronic endoscope system of this embodiment should have a vessel thickness calculator (not shown) in a blood vessel image producer 57. In an example shown in Fig. 34, the vessel thickness calculator detects vessels 150 of small thickness, a vessel 151 of standard
- ⁴⁵ thickness, and a vessel 152 of large thickness. Then, color information about the oxygen saturation is reflected merely on the vessel 152 of large thickness. The color information may have the same pattern as any of the above embodiments. For example, cyan represents low oxygen saturation, and red represents high oxygen saturation. The broadband light image 72 also includes a color bar 72b showing the relation between the oxygen saturation and the color information. The color information about the oxygen saturation may be reflected not only on thick vessels but on fine vessels or
- ⁵⁰ vessels of standard thickness. Instead of the color information, gradation of a single color may be used as information about the oxygen saturation. It is also possible to design that three kinds of vascular information, i.e. the vessel thickness, the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation, may be reflected on individual vessels in the broadband light image. [0124] Fig.35 shows another embodiment of the present invention, wherein density distribution of blood vessels in the body cavity is measured from a broadband light image 72, and then an area 155 of a given vessel density or in a given
- ⁵⁵ vessel density range is detected from the broadband light image 72. Color information corresponding to the oxygen saturation is reflected on only those vessels inside the area 155. In an electronic endoscope system of this embodiment, the blood vessel image producer 57 should include a vessel density calculator (not shown) for determining the density of the vessels in the broadband light image 72. Any of the above described color information patterns are applicable to

this embodiment. Instead of the color information, gradation of a single color may be used as information about the oxygen saturation. It is also possible to configure that three kinds of vascular information, i.e. the vessel density, the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation, may be reflected on the vascular images.

- [0125] In a case where a 160 emits fluorescent light as being doped with a fluorescent agent, it is possible to measure the intensity distribution of the fluorescent light in a broadband light image 72. Thereafter, as shown in Fig. 36, an area 160a having a certain fluorescence intensity or in a certain fluorescence intensity range is detected from the broadband light image 72. Then, color information about the oxygen saturation is reflected only those vessels inside the detected area 160a. In an electronic endoscope system of this embodiment, the blood vessel image producer 57 should include a fluorescence intensity calculator (not shown) for determining the fluorescence intensity of the vessels in the broadband
- ¹⁰ light image 72. Any of the above described color information patterns are applicable to this embodiment. Instead of the color information, gradation of a single color may be used as information about the oxygen saturation. It is also possible to configure that three kinds of vascular information, i.e. the fluorescence intensity, the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation, may be reflected on individual vessels in the broadband light image.
- [0126] In another embodiment of the present invention, as shown in Fig.37, blood concentration (hemoglobin index) of individual vessels 165, 166 and 167 is detected from the broadband light image 72. Based on the detected blood concentration, color information about the oxygen saturation is reflected on those vessels 167 having a certain blood concentration level or in a certain blood concentration range. In an electronic endoscope system of this embodiment, the blood vessel image producer 57 should include a blood concentration calculator (not shown) for detecting the blood concentration of the vessels in the broadband light image 72. Any of the above described color information is applicable
- to this embodiment. Instead of the color information, gradation of a single color may be used as information about the oxygen saturation. It is also possible to configure that three kinds of vascular information, i.e. the blood concentration, the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation, may be reflected on individual vessels in the broadband light image. [0127] As a variation of the present invention, it is possible to determine the form of blood vessels, such as the number of branches, based on the broadband light image 72, so that color information about the oxygen saturation is reflected
- on those vessels having a specified form, e.g. vessels having a greater number of branches than a given value. In an electronic endoscope system of this embodiment, the blood vessel image producer 57 should include a vessel form calculator (not shown) for determining the formation of the vessels in the broadband light image 72. Any of the above described color information is applicable to this embodiment. Instead of the color information, gradation of a single color may be used as information about the oxygen saturation. It is also possible to configure that three kinds of vascular
- ³⁰ information, i.e. the form, the depth and the oxygen saturation of the blood vessels, may be reflected on individual vessels in the broadband light image.

[0128] In any of the above embodiments, the CCD 44 having RGB pixels may be replaced with a CCD that has a first kind of pixels provided with band-pass filters for passing the first narrowband ray N1 only, a second kind of pixels provided with band-pass filters for passing the second narrowband ray N2 only, and a third kind of pixels provided with band-pass

filters for passing the third narrowband ray N3 only. With the CCD having the three kinds of band-pass filters, it comes to be possible to obtain information about the blood vessel depth and information about the oxygen saturation as well from an image frame that is captured under the broadband light BB. In conclusion, beside the above described methods, there may be a variety of other methods for obtaining information about the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation, and any method is applicable to the present invention, insofar as it is useful for measuring the blood vessel depth and the oxygen saturation.

[0129] Note that the present invention is applicable not only to the above-described electronic endoscope having the probing portion to be inserted into the body cavity, but also to a capsule-type electronic endoscope, wherein an image sensor, such as CCD, and other components are assembled into a capsule.

[0130] It should be understood that the present invention is not to be limited to the above embodiments, but many variations and modifications of the present invention will be possible for those skilled in the art without departing from the scope of the present invention as specified in the appended claims.

Claims

- 50
- 1. An electronic endoscope system comprising:
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an illuminating device (13) for projecting illumination light toward subject tissues inside a body cavity, including blood vessels, wherein said illumination light includes first, second and third narrowband rays (N1,N2) of different wavelength ranges from each other, at least one of the first, second and third narrowband rays having a central wavelength of not more than 450 nm and wherein the narrowband rays each have a wavelength range within limits of ± 10 nm;

an electronic endoscope (11) having an imaging device (44) for capturing and outputting image signals that

represent luminance of said illumination light as being projected toward and then reflected from said subject tissues;

a first narrowband signal obtaining device (12) for obtaining first and second narrowband signals from said image signals, the first and second narrowband signals corresponding to the first and second narrowband rays respectively;

a second narrowband signal obtaining device (12) for obtaining a third narrowband signal from said imaging signals, the third narrowband signal corresponding to the third narrowband ray (N3) having a different wavelength range from the first and second narrowband rays, **characterized in that** the system further comprises

a luminance ratio calculator (60) for calculating a first luminance ratio (S1/S3) between the first and third narrowband signals and a second luminance ratio (S2/S3) between the second and third narrowband signals;

a first storage device (61) previously storing correlations between the first and second luminance ratios and the vessel depth and the oxygen saturation, and

a vascular information acquiring device (57) for acquiring vascular information about vessel depth and information about oxygen saturation representative of the percentage of oxygenated hemoglobin in the blood vessels from the first and second luminance ratios calculated by said luminance ratio calculator, with reference to said correlation stored in the first storage device.

- 2. The electronic endoscope system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first and second narrowband rays include such wavelengths, at which light absorbance in oxygenated hemoglobin differs from light absorbance in reduced hemoglobin that is not combined with oxygen, and that the light absorbance in hemoglobin to the first narrowband ray and the light absorbance in hemoglobin to the second narrowband ray differ from each other.
 - **3.** The electronic endoscope system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first storage device (61) stores said correlation by correlating a luminance coordinate system (66) that indicates the first and second luminance ratios to a vascular information coordinate system (67) that indicates the vessel depth and the oxygen saturation;

said vascular information acquiring device determines first coordinates (X,Y) in said luminance coordinate system, corresponding to the first and second luminance ratios calculated by said luminance ratio calculator, and then determines second coordinates (U,V) in said vascular information coordinate system, corresponding to the first coordinates of said luminance coordinate system, one coordinate value (U) of the second coordinates representing the vessel depth and the other coordinate value (V) of the second coordinates representing the oxygen saturation.

- **4.** The electronic endoscope system as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3, wherein the first narrowband ray (N1) has a wavelength range of 440±10nm, the second narrowband ray (N2) has a wavelength range of 470±10nm, and the third narrowband ray (N3) has a wavelength range of 400±10nm.
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- 5. The electronic endoscope system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein said imaging device has red pixels, green pixels and blue pixels, which are provided with red, green and blue filters respectively, and said illuminating device is capable of projecting white broadband light (BB) having a wavelength range covering red, green and blue regions, to which the red, green and blue pixels are respectively sensitive, wherein
- said electronic endoscope system further comprises an ordinary image producer (55,56) for producing an ordinary image (72) from said image signal as captured while the broadband light is being projected.
 - 6. The electronic endoscope system as claimed in claim 5, wherein two (N1,N3) of the first to third narrowband rays have wavelength ranges, to which either the blue pixel or the green pixel is sensitive, whereas a remaining one (N2) of the first to third narrowband rays has a wavelength range, to which both the blue pixel and the green pixel are sensitive.
- 7. The electronic endoscope system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein said illuminating device is capable of projecting the first to third narrowband rays individually, and wherein said narrowband signal obtaining device obtains the first to third narrowband signals respectively from three frames of said image signals, which are captured respectively under the first to third narrowband rays which are sequentially projected from said illuminating device.
 - 8. The electronic endoscope system as claimed in claim 6, wherein said illuminating device is capable of projecting the first to third narrowband rays individually, and wherein said narrowband signal obtaining device obtains the first to third narrowband signal from first and second frames of said image signals, the first frame being captured while said illuminating device is projecting one (N1 or N3) of the first to third narrowband rays that has a wavelength range, to which either the blue pixel or the green pixel is sensitive, the second frame being captured while said illuminating device is projecting other two (N2+N3 or N1+N3) of the first to third narrowband rays simultaneously.

- **9.** The electronic endoscope system as claimed in claim 6, further comprising a second storage device (101 a) storing correlation between luminance values of blue and green pixels contained in a frame of said image signals, which is captured under the broadband light, wherein
- said illuminating device is capable of projecting the broadband light and at least one of the first to third narrowband rays simultaneously;

said imaging device captures a first frame while said illuminating device is projecting one (N1) of the first to third narrowband rays that has a wavelength range, to which either the blue pixel or the green pixel is sensitive, simultaneously with the broadband light (BB), and said imaging device captures a second frame while said illuminating device is projecting other two (N2+N3) of the first to third narrowband rays simultaneously with the broadband light (BB); and

said narrowband signal obtaining device obtains the first to third narrowband signals by subtracting those luminance values which are based on the broadband light from respective luminance values of the first and second frames, with reference to the correlation stored in the second storage device.

- 15 10. The electronic endoscope system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein said illuminating device is capable of projecting white broadband light having a wavelength range covering from blue region to red region as well as all the wavelength ranges of the first to third narrowband rays, and wherein said electronic endoscope system (102) further comprises an optical filter (103) for filtering the broadband light as reflected from the subject tissues, said optical filter being able to selectively pass one of the first to third narrowband rays therethrough to said imaging device, so said imaging device sequentially outputs image signals each corresponding to the one of the first to third narrowband rays that passes through said optical filter, and said narrowband signal obtaining device obtains these image signals as the first to third narrowband signals.
- 11. A processor (12) for an electronic endoscope that projects illumination light toward subject tissues inside a body cavity and outputs image signals representative of luminance of said illumination light as being reflected from the subject tissues and captured through an imaging device, wherein said illumination light includes first, second and third narrowband rays of different wavelength ranges from each other, at least one of the first, second and third narrowband rays having a central wavelength of not more than 450 nm, said processor comprising:
- a signal receiving device for receiving said image signals from said electronic endoscope;
 a first narrowband signal obtaining device (12) for obtaining first and second narrowband signals from said image signals, the first and second narrowband signals corresponding to the first and second narrowband rays respectively;
- a second narrowband signal obtaining device (12) for obtaining a third narrowband signal from said imaging signals, the third narrowband signal corresponding to the third narrowband ray (N3) having a different wavelength range from the first and second narrowband rays, **characterized in that** the processor further comprises a luminance ratio calculator (60) for calculating a first luminance ratio (S1/S3) between the first and third narrowband signals and a second luminance ratio (S2/S3) between the second and third narrowband signals; a first storage device (61) previously storing correlations between the first and second luminance ratios and the
- vessel depth and the oxygen saturation, and
 a vascular information acquiring device (57) for acquiring vascular information about vessel depth and information
 about oxygen saturation representative of the percentage of oxygenated hemoglobin in the blood vessels from
 the first and second luminance ratios calculated by said luminance ratio calculator, with reference to said
 correlation stored in the first storage device.
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- 12. The processor for the electronic endoscope as claimed in claim 11, wherein the first and second narrowband rays include such wavelengths, at which light absorbance in oxygenated hemoglobin differs from light absorbance in reduced hemoglobin that is not combined with oxygen, and that the light absorbance in hemoglobin to the first narrowband ray and the light absorbance in hemoglobin to the second narrowband ray differ from each other.
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Patentansprüche

1. Elektronisches Endoskopsystem, umfassend:

eine Beleuchtungseinrichtung (13) zum Projizieren von Beleuchtungslicht auf ein Objektgewebe im Inneren eines Körperhohlraums einschließlich Blutgefäße, wobei das Beleuchtungslicht erste, zweite und dritte schmalbandige Strahlen (N1, N2) voneinander verschiedener Wellenlängenbereiche enthält, wobei mindestens einer

von dem ersten, dem zweiten und dem dritten schmalbandigen Strahl eine Mittenwellenlänge von nicht mehr als 450 nm aufweist und die schmalbandigen Strahlen jeweils einen Wellenlängenbereich innerhalb von Grenzen von \pm 10 nm besitzen;

ein elektronisches Endoskop (11) mit einer Bildgebungseinrichtung (44) zum Aufnehmen und Ausgeben von Bildsignalen, welche Luminanz des Beleuchtungslichts repräsentieren, wenn dieses auf Objektgewebe projiziert und dann von diesen reflektiert wird;

eine erste Schmalbandsignal-Gewinnungseinrichtung (12) zum Gewinnen eines ersten und eines zweiten Schmalbandsignals aus den Bildsignalen, wobei das erste und das zweite Schmalbandsignal dem ersten bzw. dem zweiten schmalbandigen Strahl entsprechen;

- ¹⁰ eine zweite Schmalbandsignal-Gewinnungseinrichtung (12) zum Gewinnen eines dritten Schmalbandsignals aus den Bildsignalen, wobei das dritte Schmalbandsignal dem dritten schmalbandigen Strahl (N3) mit einem von dem ersten und dem zweiten schmalbandigen Strahl verschiedenen Wellenlängenbereich aufweist, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** das System weiterhin aufweist:
- einen Luminanzverhältnisrechner (60) zum Berechnen eines ersten Luminanzverhältnisses (S1/S3) zwi schen dem ersten und dem dritten Schmalbandsignal, und eines zweiten Luminanzverhältnisses (S2/S3)
 zwischen dem zweiten und dem dritten Schmalbandsignal;

eine erste Speichereinrichtung (61), die vorab Korrelationen zwischen den ersten und zweiten Luminanzverhältnissen und der Gefäßtiefe und der Sauerstoffsättigung speichert, und

- 20 eine Vaskularinformation-Erfassungseinrichtung (57) zum Erfassen von Vaskularinformation über Gefäßtiefe und Information über Sauerstoffsättigung repräsentativ für den Prozentsatz von Sauerstoffangereichertem Hämoglobin in den Blutgefäßen aus dem ersten und dem zweiten Luminanzverhältnis, die von dem Luminanzverhältnisrechner berechnet wurden, in Bezug auf die in der ersten Speichereinrichtung gespeicherte Korrelation.
- Elektronisches Endoskopsystem nach Anspruch 1, bei dem der erste und der zweite schmalbandige Strahl derartige Wellenlängen enthalten, bei denen eine Lichtabsorption in Sauerstoff-angereichertem Hämoglobin verschieden ist von Lichtabsorption in reduziertem Hämoglobin, das nicht mit Sauerstoff kombiniert ist, und die Lichtabsorption in Hämoglobin für den ersten schmalbandigen Strahl und die Lichtabsorption in Hämoglobin für den zweiten schmalbandigen Strahl voneinander verschieden sind.
 - Elektronisches Endoskopsystem nach Anspruch 1, bei dem die erste Speichereinrichtung (61) die Korrelation speichert, indem sie ein Luminanz-Koordinatensystem (66), welches das erste und das zweite Luminanzverhältnis angibt, mit einem Vaskularinformation-Koordinatensystem (67), welches die Gefäßtiefe und die Sauerstoffsättigung angibt, korreliert;

wobei die Vaskularinformation-Erfassungseinrichtung erste Koordinaten (X, Y) in dem Luminanzkoordinatensystem entsprechend dem von dem Luminanzverhältnisrechner berechneten ersten und zweiten Luminanzverhältnis bestimmt, und dann zweite Koordinaten (U, V) in dem Vaskularinformation-Koordinatensystem entsprechend den ersten Koordinaten des Luminanzkoordinatensystems bestimmt, wobei ein Koordinatenwert (U) der zweiten Koordinaten die Gefäßtiefe und der andere Koordinatenwert (V) der zweiten Koordinaten die Sauerstoffsättigung repräsentiert.

- 4. Elektronisches Endoskopsystem nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 3, bei dem der erste schmalbandige Strahl (N1) einen Wellenlängenbereich von 440 ± 10 nm, der zweite schmalbandige Strahl (N2) einen Wellenlängenbereich von 470 ± 10 nm, und der dritte schmalbandige Strahl (N3) einen Wellenlängenbereich von 400 ± 10 nm aufweist.
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- 5. Elektronisches Endoskopsystem nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 4, bei dem die Bildgebungseinrichtung rote Pixel, grüne Pixel und blaue Pixel aufweist, die mit roten, grünen bzw. blauen Filtern ausgestattet sind, und die Beleuchtungseinrichtung in der Lage ist, weißes breitbandiges Licht (BB) mit einem Wellenlängenbereich, der
- rote, grüne und blaue Bereiche abdeckt, für die die roten, grünen bzw. blauen Pixel empfindlich sind, zu projizieren, wobei
 das elektronische Endoskopsystem weiterhin einen Normalbilderzeuger (55, 56) zum Erzeugen eines Normalbilds (72) aus den Bildsignalen bei Aufnahme mit Projektion des breitbandigen Lichts aufweist.
- 55 6. Elektronisches Endoskopsystem nach Anspruch 5, bei dem zwei (N1, N3) von den ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahlen Wellenlängenbereiche aufweisen, für die entweder das blaue Pixel oder das grüne Pixel empfindlich ist, während ein verbliebener (N2) von dem ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahl einen Wellenlängenbereich aufweist, für den sowohl das blaue als auch das grüne Pixel empfindlich sind.

- 7. Elektronisches Endoskopsystem nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 6, bei dem die Beleuchtungseinrichtung in der Lage ist, den ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahl individuell zu projizieren, und wobei die Schmalbandsignal-Gewinnungseinrichtung das erste bis dritte Schmalbandsignal von drei Einzelbildern der Bildsignale gewinnt, die unter dem ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahl, die sequentiell von der Beleuchtungseinrichtung projiziert werden, aufgenommen werden.
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8. Elektronisches Endoskopsystem nach Anspruch 6, bei dem die Beleuchtungseinrichtung in der Lage ist, den ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahl individuell zu projizieren, und wobei die Schmalbandsignal-Gewinnungseinrichtung das erste bis dritte Schmalbandsignal aus ersten und zweiten Einzelbildern der Bildsignale gewinnt, wobei das erste Einzelbild aufgenommen wird, während die Beleuchtungseinrichtung einen (N1 oder N3) von dem ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahl projiziert, der einen Wellenlängenbereich aufweist, für den entweder das blaue Pixel oder das grüne Pixel empfindlich ist, und das zweite Einzelbild aufgenommen wird, während die Beleuchtungseinrichtung schmalbandigen Strahl projiziert.

- 9. Elektronisches Endoskopsystem nach Anspruch 6, weiterhin umfassend eine zweite Speichereinrichtung (101 a), welche eine Korrelation zwischen Luminanzwerten von blauen und grünen Pixeln speichert, die in einem Einzelbild der Bildsignale enthalten sind, das unter dem breitbandigen Licht aufgenommen wird, wobei die Beleuchtungseinrichtung in der Lage ist, das breitbandige Licht und mindestens einen von dem ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahl gleichzeitig zu projizieren;
- 20 die Bildgebungseinrichtung ein erstes Einzelbild aufnimmt, während die Beleuchtungseinrichtung einen (N1) von dem ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahl projiziert, der einen Wellenlängenbereich aufweist, für den entweder das blaue Pixel oder das grüne Pixel empfindlich ist, gleichzeitig mit dem breitbandigen Licht (BB), und die Bildgebungseinrichtung ein zweites Einzelbild aufnimmt, während die Beleuchtungseinrichtung weitere zwei (N2 + N3) von dem ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahl gleichzeitig mit dem breitbandigen Licht (BB) projiziert; und
- ²⁵ die Schmalbandsignal-Gewinnungseinrichtung das erste bis dritte schmalbandige Signal gewinnt, indem solche Luminanzwerte, die auf dem breitbandigen Licht basieren, von den jeweiligen Luminanzwerten des ersten und des zweiten Einzelbilds unter Bezugnahme auf die in der zweiten Speichereinrichtung gespeicherten Korrelation subtrahiert.
- 30 10. Elektronisches Endoskopsystem nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 6, bei dem die Beleuchtungseinrichtung in der Lage ist, weißes breitbandiges Licht mit einem Wellenlängenbereich, der den Bereich vom blauen Bereich bis zum roten Bereich abdeckt, sowie sämtliche Wellenlängenbereiche des ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahls abdeckt, zu projizieren, und
- wobei das elektronische Endoskopsystem (102) weiterhin ein optisches Filter (103) zum Filtern des von den Ob jektgeweben reflektierten breitbandigen Lichts aufweist, wobei das optische Filter in der Lage ist, selektiv einen von dem ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahl zu der Bildgebungseinrichtung durchzulassen, so dass die Bildgebungseinrichtung sequentiell Bildsignale ausgibt, die jeweils einem von dem ersten bis dritten schmalbandigen Strahl entsprechen, der durch das optische Filter gelangt, und die Schmalbandsignal-Gewinnungseinrichtung diese Bildsignale als das erste bis dritte Schmalbandsignal gewinnt.
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11. Prozessor (12) für ein elektronisches Endoskop, das Beleuchtungslicht auf Objektgewebe im Inneren eines Körperhohlraums projiziert und Bildsignale ausgibt, die repräsentativ sind für Luminanz des Beleuchtungslichts nach Reflexion von den Objektgeweben, und die von einer Bildgebungseinrichtung aufgenommen wurden, wobei das Beleuchtungslicht erste, zweite und dritte schmalbandige Strahlen mit voneinander verschiedenen Wellenlängenbereichen enthält, wobei mindestens einer von dem ersten, dem zweiten und dem dritten schmalbandigen Strahl eine Mittenwellenlänge von nicht mehr als 450 nm aufweist, wobei der Prozessor umfasst:

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eine Signalempfangseinrichtung zum Empfangen der Bildsignale von dem elektronischen Endoskop, eine erste Schmalbandsignal-Gewinnungseinrichtung (12) zum Gewinnen eines ersten und eines zweiten Schmalbandsignals aus den Bildsignalen, wobei das erste und das zweite Schmalbandsignal dem ersten bzw. dem zweiten schmalbandigen Strahl entsprechen; eine zweite Schmalbandsignal-Gewinnungseinrichtung (12) zum Gewinnen eines dritten Schmalbandsignals aus den Bildsignalen, wobei das dritte Schmalbandsignal dem dritten schmalbandigen Strahl (N3) mit einem von dem ersten und dem zweiten schmalbandigen Strahl verschiedenen Wellenlängenbereich aufweist, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** das System weiterhin aufweist:

einen Luminanzverhältnisrechner (60) zum Berechnen eines ersten Luminanzverhältnisses (S1/S3) zwischen dem ersten und dem dritten Schmalbandsignal, und eines zweiten Luminanzverhältnisses (S2/S3)

zwischen dem zweiten und dem dritten Schmalbandsignal;

eine erste Speichereinrichtung (61), die vorab Korrelationen zwischen den ersten und zweiten Luminanzverhältnissen und der Gefäßtiefe und der Sauerstoffsättigung speichert, und

- eine Vaskularinformation-Erfassungseinrichtung (57) zum Erfassen von Vaskularinformation über Gefäßtiefe und Information über Sauerstoffsättigung repräsentativ für den Prozentsatz von Sauerstoffangereichertem Hämoglobin in den Blutgefäßen aus dem ersten und dem zweiten Luminanzverhältnis, die von dem Luminanzverhältnisrechner berechnet wurden, in Bezug auf die in der ersten Speichereinrichtung gespeicherte Korrelation.
- 10 12. Prozessor für das elektronische Endoskop nach Anspruch 11, bei dem der erste und der zweite schmalbandige Strahl derartige Wellenlängen enthalten, bei denen Lichtabsorption in Sauerstoff-angereichertem Hämoglobin verschieden ist von der Lichtabsorption in reduziertem Hämoglobin, welches nicht mit Sauerstoff beladen ist, und dass die Lichtabsorption in Hämoglobin für den ersten schmalbandigen Strahl und die Lichtabsorption in Hämoglobin für den zweiten schmalbandigen Strahl verschieden voneinander sind.
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Revendications

- 1. Système pour endoscope électronique, comprenant :
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un dispositif d'éclairage (13) destiné à projeter une lumière d'éclairage vers des tissus de sujet dans une cavité corporelle, incluant des vaisseaux sanguins, dans lequel ladite lumière d'éclairage inclut des premier, deuxième et troisième rayonnements à bande étroite (NI, N2) de gammes de longueurs d'onde différentes entre elles, au moins un des premier, deuxième et troisième rayonnements à bande étroite troisième rayonnements à bande étroite troisième rayonnements à bande étroite présentant une longueur d'onde centrale non supérieure à 450 nm, et dans lequel les rayonnements à bande étroite présentent une gamme de longueurs d'onde dans des limites de ± 10 nm ;

un endoscope électronique (11) présentant un dispositif d'imagerie (44) destiné à capturer et émettre des signaux d'image qui représentent une luminance de ladite lumière d'éclairage comme étant projetée vers lesdits tissus de sujet, puis réfléchie à partir de ceux-ci ;

³⁰ un premier dispositif d'obtention de signal à bande étroite (12) destiné à obtenir des premier et deuxième signaux
 à bande étroite à partir desdits signaux d'image, les premier et deuxième signaux à bande étroite correspondant
 respectivement aux premier et deuxième rayonnements à bande étroite ;

un deuxième dispositif d'obtention de signal à bande étroite (12) destiné à obtenir un troisième signal à bande étroite à partir desdits signaux d'imagerie, le troisième signal à bande étroite correspondant au troisième rayon ³⁵ nement à bande étroite (N3) présentant une gamme de longueurs d'onde différente des premier et deuxième rayonnements à bande étroite, caractérisé en ce que le système comprend en outre :

- un calculateur de rapport de luminance (60) destiné à calculer un premier rapport de luminance (S1/S3) entre les premier et troisième signaux à bande étroite et un second rapport de luminance (S2/S3) entre les second et troisième signaux à bande étroite ;
- un premier dispositif de stockage (61) stockant au préalable des corrélations entre les premier et second rapports de luminance et la profondeur de vaisseau et la saturation en oxygène, et
- un dispositif d'acquisition d'informations vasculaires (57) destiné à acquérir des informations vasculaires concernant la profondeur de vaisseau et des informations concernant la saturation en oxygène représentatives du pourcentage d'oxyhémoglobine dans les vaisseaux sanguins à partir des premier et second rapports de luminance calculés par ledit calculateur de rapport de luminance, avec référence à ladite corrélation stockée dans le premier dispositif de stockage.
- 2. Système pour endoscope électronique selon la revendication 1, dans lequel les premier et second rayonnements à bande étroite incluent des longueurs d'onde auxquelles l'absorbance de lumière dans l'oxyhémoglobine diffère de l'absorbance de lumière dans l'hémoglobine réduite qui n'est pas combinée à l'oxygène, et l'absorbance de lumière dans l'hémoglobine au premier rayonnement à bande étroite et l'absorbance de lumière dans l'hémoglobine au second rayonnement à bande étroite diffèrent entre elles.
- Système pour endoscope électronique selon la revendication 1, dans lequel le premier dispositif de stockage (61) stocke ladite corrélation en corrélant un système de coordonnées de luminance (66) qui indique les premier et second rapports de luminance avec un système de coordonnées d'informations vasculaires (67) qui indique la profondeur de vaisseau et la saturation en oxygène ;

ledit dispositif d'acquisition d'informations vasculaires détermine des premières coordonnées (X, Y) dans ledit système de coordonnées de luminance, correspondant aux premier et second rapports de luminance calculés par ledit calculateur de rapport de luminance, puis détermine des secondes coordonnées (U, V) dans ledit système de coordonnées d'informations vasculaires, correspondant aux premières coordonnées dudit système de coordonnées de luminance, une valeur de coordonnée (U) des secondes coordonnées représentant la profondeur de vaisseau et l'autre valeur de coordonnée (V) des secondes coordonnées représentant la saturation en oxygène.

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étroite simultanément.

4. Système pour endoscope électronique selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 3, dans lequel le premier rayonnement à bande étroite (N1) présente une gamme de longueurs d'onde de 440 ± 10 nm, le second rayonnement à bande étroite (N2) présente une gamme de longueurs d'onde de 470 ± 10 nm, et le troisième rayonnement à bande étroite (N3) présente une gamme de longueurs d'onde de 400 ± 10 nm.

5. Système pour endoscope électronique selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 4, dans lequel ledit dispositif d'imagerie présente des pixels rouges, des pixels verts et des pixels bleus, lesquels sont respectivement dotés de filtres rouge, vert et bleu,

ledit dispositif d'éclairage est en mesure de projeter une lumière à large bande blanche (BB) présentant une gamme de longueurs d'onde couvrant des régions rouge, verte et bleue, auxquelles les pixels respectivement rouges, verts et bleus sont sensibles, dans lequel

ledit système pour endoscope électronique comprend en outre un producteur d'image ordinaire (55, 56) destiné à
 produire une image ordinaire (72) à partir dudit signal d'image tel que capturé lors de la projection de la lumière à
 large bande.

6. Système pour endoscope électronique selon la revendication 5, dans lequel deux (NI, N3) des premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite présentent des gammes de longueurs d'onde auxquelles soit le pixel bleu soit le pixel vert est sensible, tandis qu'un restant (N2) des premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite présente une gamme de longues d'onde à laquelle le pixel bleu et le pixel vert sont tous les deux sensibles.

- 7. Système pour endoscope électronique selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 6, dans lequel ledit dispositif d'éclairage est en mesure de projeter les premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite individuellement, et dans lequel ledit dispositif d'obtention de signal à bande étroite obtient les premier au troisième signaux à bande étroite respectivement à partir de trois trames desdits signaux d'image, lesquelles sont capturées respectivement sous les premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite qui sont projetés séquentiellement à partir dudit dispositif d'éclairage.
- 8. Système pour endoscope électronique selon la revendication 6, dans lequel ledit dispositif d'éclairage est en mesure de projeter les premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite individuellement, et dans lequel ledit dispositif d'obtention de signal à bande étroite obtient le premier au troisième signaux à bande étroite à partir de première et deuxième trames desdits signaux d'image, la première trame étant capturée tandis que ledit dispositif d'éclairage projette un (N1 ou N3) des premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite qui présente une gamme de longueurs d'onde à laquelle soit le pixel bleu soit le pixel vert est sensible, la deuxième trame étant capturée tandis que ledit dispositif d'éclairage projette deux autres (N2+N3 ou N1+N3) des premier au troisième rayonnements à bande
- 9. Système pour endoscope électronique selon la revendication 6, comprenant en outre un second dispositif de stoc ⁴⁵ kage (101a) stockant une corrélation entre des valeurs de luminance de pixels bleu et vert contenus dans une trame desdits signaux d'image, laquelle est capturée sous la lumière à large bande, dans lequel

ledit dispositif d'éclairage est en mesure de projeter la lumière à large bande et au moins un des premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite simultanément ;

- ledit dispositif d'imagerie capture une première trame tandis que ledit dispositif d'éclairage projette un (N1) des
 premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite qui présente une gamme de longueurs d'onde à laquelle soit
 le pixel bleu soit le pixel vert est sensible, simultanément avec la lumière à large bande (BB), et ledit dispositif
 d'imagerie capture une seconde trame tandis que ledit dispositif d'éclairage projette deux autres (N2+N3) des
 premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite simultanément avec la lumière à large bande (BB), et
- ledit dispositif d'obtention de signal à bande étroite obtient le premier au troisième signaux à bande étroite en
 soustrayant les valeurs de luminance qui reposent sur la lumière à large bande de valeurs de luminance respectives
 des première et deuxième trames, avec référence à la corrélation stockée dans le second dispositif de stockage.
 - 10. Système pour endoscope électronique selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 6, dans lequel ledit dispositif

d'éclairage est en mesure de projeter une lumière à large bande blanche présentant une gamme de longueurs d'onde couvrant de la région bleue à une région rouge ainsi que toutes les gammes de longueurs d'onde des premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite, et

- dans lequel ledit système pour endoscope électronique (102) comprend en outre un filtre optique (103) destiné à 5 filtrer la lumière à large bande telle que réfléchie à partir de tissus de sujet, ledit filtre optique étant en mesure de laisser passer à travers lui de manière sélective un des premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite vers ledit dispositif d'imagerie, de sorte que ledit dispositif d'imagerie émet de manière séquentielle des signaux d'image correspondant chacun à l'un des premier au troisième rayonnements à bande étroite qui passe à travers ledit filtre optique, et ledit dispositif d'obtention de signal à bande étroite obtient ces signaux d'image comme les premier au 10 troisième rayonnements à bande étroite.
- 11. Processeur (12) pour un endoscope électronique qui projette une lumière d'éclairage vers des tissus de sujet dans une cavité corporelle et émet des signaux d'image représentatifs de la luminance de ladite lumière d'éclairage comme étant réfléchie à partir des tissus de sujet et capturée par le biais d'un dispositif d'imagerie, dans leguel 15 ladite lumière d'éclairage inclut des premier, deuxième et troisième rayonnements à bande étroite de gammes de longueurs d'onde différentes entre elles, au moins un des premier, deuxième et troisième rayonnements à bande étroite présentant une longueur d'onde centrale non supérieure à 450 nm, ledit processeur comprenant :
 - un dispositif de réception de signaux destiné à recevoir lesdits signaux d'image provenant dudit endoscope électronique ;

un premier dispositif d'obtention de signal à bande étroite (12) destiné à obtenir des premier et deuxième signaux à bande étroite à partir desdits signaux d'image, les premier et deuxième signaux à bande étroite correspondant respectivement aux premier et deuxième rayonnements à bande étroite ;

- un deuxième dispositif d'obtention de signal à bande étroite (12) destiné à obtenir un troisième signal à bande 25 étroite à partir desdits signaux d'imagerie, le troisième signal à bande étroite correspondant au troisième rayonnement à bande étroite (N3) présentant une gamme de longueurs d'onde différente des premier et deuxième rayonnements à bande étroite, caractérisé en ce que le processeur comprend en outre :
- un calculateur de rapport de luminance (60) destiné à calculer un premier rapport de luminance (S1/S3) 30 entre les premier et troisième signaux à bande étroite et un second rapport de luminance (S2/S3) entre les second et troisième signaux à bande étroite ;

un premier dispositif de stockage (61) stockant au préalable des corrélations entre les premier et second rapports de luminance et la profondeur de vaisseau et la saturation en oxygène, et

- un dispositif d'acquisition d'informations vasculaires (57) destiné à acquérir des informations vasculaires 35 concernant la profondeur de vaisseau et des informations concernant la saturation en oxygène représentatives du pourcentage d'oxyhémoglobine dans les vaisseaux sanguins à partir des premier et second rapports de luminance calculés par ledit calculateur de rapport de luminance, avec référence à ladite corrélation stockée dans le premier dispositif de stockage.
- 40 12. Processeur pour l'endoscope électronique selon la revendication 11, dans lequel les premier et deuxième rayonnements à bande étroite incluent des longueurs d'ondes auxquelles l'absorbance de lumière dans l'oxyhémoglobine diffère de l'absorbance de lumière dans l'hémoglobine réduite qui n'est pas combinée à l'oxygène, et l'absorbance de lumière dans l'hémoglobine au premier rayonnement à bande étroite et l'absorbance de lumière dans l'hémoglobine au second rayonnement à bande étroite diffèrent entre elles.

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FIG.3





FIG.6





FIG.7B





























VESSEL DEPTH

FIG.19A



VESSEL DEPTH

FIG.19B



OXYGEN SATURATION







FIG.20B



VESSEL DEPTH

















































REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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patsnap

用于电子内窥镜的电子内窥镜系统	和处理器	
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2009227549 2009-09-30 JP 2009228771 2009-09-30 JP 2010072066 2010-03-26 JP		
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<u>Espacenet</u>		
	用于电子内窥镜的电子内窥镜系统 EP2305094B1 EP2010178592 富士胶片株式会社 富士胶片株式会社 富士胶片株式会社 SAITOU TAKAAKI MINETOMA YASUHIRO CHUN MINKYUNG SAITOU, TAKAAKI MINETOMA, YASUHIRO CHUN, MINKYUNG A61B1/04 A61B5/00 A61B5/0059 A61B1/00186 A61B1 /1459 A61B5/489 2009227549 2009-09-30 JP 2009228771 2009-09-30 JP 2009228771 2009-09-30 JP 2010072066 2010-03-26 JP EP2305094A1 Espacenet	用于电子内窥镜的电子内窥镜系统和处理器 EP2305094B1 公开(公告)日 EP2010178592 申请日 富士胶片株式会社 富士胶片株式会社 富士胶片株式会社 SAITOU TAKAAKI MINETOMA YASUHIRO CHUN MINKYUNG SAITOU, TAKAAKI MINETOMA, YASUHIRO CHUN, MINKYUNG A61B1/04 A61B5/00 A61B5/0059 A61B1/00186 A61B1/063 A61B1/0638 A61B1/0646 A6 /1459 A61B5/489 2009227549 2009-09-30 JP 2009227549 2009-09-30 JP 2009227549 2009-09-30 JP 2010072066 2010-03-26 JP EP2305094A1 Espacenet

摘要(译)

投射到体腔中的照明光包括不同波长范围的第一至第三窄带光线(N1, N2,N3),这些窄带光线中的至少一个具有不大于450nm的中心波长。 在这些窄带射线下,分别通过内窥镜获得第一至第三窄带图像信号。基 于第一至第三窄带图像信号,确定包含血管的血管区域,并且第一和第 三窄带信号之间的第一亮度比(S1/S3)和第二和第三窄带信号之间的 第二亮度比(S2/S3)在血管区域的每个像素处计算窄带信号。根据计 算的第一和第二亮度比,参考将第一和第二亮度比与血管深度和氧饱和 度相关的相关数据,获取关于血管的深度和氧饱和度的信息。

